UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"ABSOLUTELY NOT THE SAME": THE POTENTIAL AND PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA

BY

DEFENG LI ©

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "ABSOLUTELY NOT THE SAME": THE POTENTIAL AND PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA submitted by Defeng LI in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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In memory of my dad and mum

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore Chinese English teachers' understanding of English teaching, particularly the difficulties they have had in using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Chinese context.

The qualitative case study method was used to address the research question. Participants were six Chinese English teachers, two from each of the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels. The major modes of data collection consisted of semi-structured and informal interviews and on-site observations of teaching.

The findings of the study included: Chinese English teachers, while cognizant of the achievements, found serious problems in TEFL in China. They have had many difficulties in implementing CLT in their classrooms. Although interested in change and eager to identify with CLT, they were not optimistic about overcoming the difficulties and thus felt that there would be only limited use of CLT in TEFL in China.

Difficulties that the Chinese teachers have encountered in using CLT have their sources in that CLT, as a methodology developed in the West, is laden with Western cultural values which are very different from dominant Chinese cultural values.

Suggestions were made for TEFL in China and TEFL in general. Rather than adopt CLT completely, Chinese teachers might want to incorporate a

communicative component into their traditional teaching methods. For this purpose, changes must be made in teachers' understanding of language learning, teaching and curricula in teacher education programs. A theoretical framework needs to be worked out to facilitate the process of introducing teaching methods into different contexts. Expatriate English teachers should take into account their host country's cultural values and educational philosophy when considering exporting their teaching methods. Considering the difficulties involved in introduction of teaching methods into different contexts, EFL countries like China are encouraged to establish their own contingents of EFL researchers and empower their teachers in the hope that they will be able to devise methods that will fit better into their particular language teaching contexts.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the past fifteen years China has undergone tremendous changes, with the two most salient ones being the implementation of the open-door policy and the introduction of a market economy into the country. Economic development and modernization have been the ultimate goals of all activities of the government. In its efforts to achieve these goals, China turned its eyes to foreign countries, particularly the Western developed countries, for technology and capital. To facilitate the process, China has put English teaching upon its agenda since the late 1970s and early 1980s. English and English learning and teaching have never received more attention than today. In striving to train more and better English-speaking personnel, China has also turned to the West for English teaching methods. Communicative language teaching (CLT), as the most recent development in English as a second language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching methods, has been introduced into China.

However, the complexities of China's education and English teaching seemed to have created big challenges for CLT to take root in the country. To provide a glimpse of the complexities, it seems appropriate to begin the report of this study by sharing with the reader my own reflective teaching stories that I have written in the past year in Canada.

My Reflective Learning and Teaching Stories

Took the Right Path, Entered the Wrong Gate
How I Became a Teacher of English

I enjoy teaching, but I did not choose to be a teacher. I like teaching English, but I did not choose to be a teacher of English.

I began to study English when I was 16 years old in grade three in middle school. I still remember my first English lesson. It was a hot September afternoon. The teacher and students were sweating all over. However, the teacher was very enthusiastic and energetic throughout the lesson and did not seem to be bothered by the heat at all. Neither did we students. We were repeating after the teacher at the top of our voices throughout the entire class. Yet all we learned and repeated were four English words. Today I can only recall two of them, PLANE and FLAG. We were all very excited and felt the lesson finished too soon.

Several of us living in the same village were then studying in the same class. As our village was fairly far from the middle school we were attending, it usually took us more than half an hour to walk home. But we did not seem to mind the distance except in winter and on rainy days. Actually we quite enjoyed the walk because it was a time when we could talk, argue, shout, laugh, run, jump, fight and reconcile.

The English class was the last period of the day. It was a shame that it finished so soon but it was really nice to get out of the crowded, stuffy, hot classroom and breathe some fresh air. Besides it was again the best time of the day for us. Quickly but quietly, we gathered our books and stuffed them into our bags. We took particular care not to show our eagerness because the English teacher was still in the classroom. We tried hard to walk slowly out of the classroom. We tried even harder to walk slowly when we were walking from our classroom to the school gate because teachers and principals could turn up any time. Like other clusters of students, we were walking slowly but steadily forward. We were walking straight lines because we learned in math class that straight lines are the shortest. We were cutting corners whenever we could. Having walked this way hundreds of times, we could get out of the school along

the shortest line with our eyes closed. As soon as we got out of the school gate, we made a right turn. As soon as we made this turn, we sped off. We ran until we were sure that no teacher could see or hear us. That was usually the time we felt too tired to run any farther and began to relax and enjoy ourselves.

While we were walking home on the lanes among the green rice fields, a plane happened to be flying over us, high in the sky. The one who first heard and saw it and shouted "plane" in Chinese. Suddenly all of us were shouting "plane", "plane", ... in English. Then, for a change, and to use another English word we had just learned that afternoon, I shouted "flag". My friend quickly followed me, yelling "flag", "flag".... Though we could barely see the plane, no one argued with me that he could not see the flag at all. When the plane was long gone, we were still yelling "plane" ,"flag", "flag", "plane". This is probably why I can recall the two words easily today.

Why were we learning English? Would I ever get a chance to use it? When would I be able to use it? These questions never occurred to me then. For me, English was just one of the school subjects like Chinese, mathematics, chemistry that a student must take and do well in. Besides, curiosity also drove me to work hard at it. So despite the fact that we had a frequent change of English teachers and the most "qualified" English teacher I had in middle school was a student teacher from a two-year teachers' school, who taught us for three weeks during her practicum, I did very well in English. However, the subject I did best was chemistry.

Mr. Pan (Pseudonyms are used in the document to maintain anonymity) was the best English teacher I had in middle school. It was I who wanted to enter the university, but it was he who decided what I should take. One day, he told me to see him at his office. When I got there he told me that I should take English at the university but did not tell me why. Like most students in China,

especially those in the schools in the rural areas, I put my full trust in my teachers. Without questioning, I accepted his suggestion. This happened when I was in grade two in senior middle school. From then on, I knew I was going to study English at the university in two years' time if I succeeded in the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning.

Mr. Tong was the teacher who decided that I should go to a teacher's university. He taught us math, which was another subject I did very well in in middle school. Though he never suggested that I should take mathematics at the university, he did make a strong suggestion that I should apply for admission to a teachers' university. Again, without asking why, I applied for admission to a teachers' university, which was later the university where I studied and taught.

The moment of receiving the Letter of Admission from the university was extremely exciting and memorable. In a village where there had never been any one who entered the university before, going to study at the university was a big event. When the long-awaited postman finally came to our village, asking around for Defeng Li, several people ran to our house and told me the news. When I went out to meet the postman, there was a big crowd following me. It seemed as if I suddenly became a hero after a victory, which I often saw in Chinese revolutionary films. When I got the Letter of Admission in hand, everyone wanted to have a look. Those who could read would read it aloud. Those who could not read would comment on the quality of the paper and how the Chinese characters looked in the letter. Everyone seemed to be trying to find out what this letter really meant, for me, for them, for the village. People seemed to find it hard to understand why a person who had been living in their daily life could now leave the place and study at the university. I noticed that for the first time elder people started to look at me seriously and had an ear for what I had to say.

Two weeks after I received the Letter of Admission I was chatting with my brother-in-law when he suddenly asked me, "What will you be after your graduation?" "Gee, I've never thought about that. Maybe...." Before I could finish, he interrupted, "Oh, I know. Nothing but a school teacher!" Hearing this, I did not say anything. First, I did not know what to say. Second, I was still very much excited with being admitted to the university. I wanted to indulge myself in the excitement and pride the admission had brought me as long as I could. However, though I tried not to let my happiness at going to study at the university be spoiled, the Letter of Admission seemed to be losing its magnificence.

Two weeks later, the comments made by another brother-in-law of mine accelerated the disappearance of the magnificence of the Letter of Admission. He was an official in the educational bureau in our county. In our conversation, he said, "Well, you know you will be back teaching English in a middle school in four years." "Be back!" I murmured. Now, I fully understood what a teachers' university meant to me: I would study English at a city for four years and come back to a village to teach English in a middle school for the rest of my life, and maybe never leave my home village again. "No time to be sorry. Too late to regret." I told myself. "Go for it and make the best of it." And then I remembered the English saying I had learned "God helps those who help themselves."

Nanjing, where my university was located, was then a completely unknown world to me, who had never before ventured outside of my home village. My father offered to escort me. But I felt that it was time that I become independent and therefore insisted I should go alone, which I did. All I remember about going to my university was that it was a hundred times more challenging and worse than going outside China some ten years later to Edmonton in Canada, where I knew nobody but a few names before my arrival.

In attending Nanjing Teachers' University, my experience can best be described as "took the right path, but entered the wrong gate". Nanjing Teachers' University is a university, but, alas, only a teachers' university.

After entering the university, I happily learned that there was a chance not to teach in a middle school but in a university, hence not having to return to my home village, perhaps being stuck there the rest of my life. But this would mean another four years of hard work and another series of examinations at the end of my university studies. If I succeeded, I would be admitted to a Master's program. Then I would be able to teach at the university upon graduation.

Since this was the only way that I could escape the fate of teaching in a rural school, I did not even hesitate for a single minute in making the decision to work hard for another four years. Hard work paid off. Despite the fierce competition, I was admitted to a master's program after receiving my B.A., where I studied for three years.

After I received my M.A. in 1990, I began to teach in the university where I studied. I taught there for four years. Fortunately, I found I enjoyed teaching at the university and I liked teaching English. However, I have often had the idea that I could do better as a chemist, lawyer or a medical doctor (Lawyers and medical doctors do not make more money than teachers in China). Unfortunately, there is no way to find out whether that is true or not. It is too late for me to do a Ph.D in chemistry, law or medicine. All I can do is to have hope in my sons and daughters. I hope they will be interested in becoming a chemist, a lawyer or a medical doctor. Maybe they will not be interested at all. But that doesn't matter. What really matters is that I would like to make sure that they will have the chance to explore what they want to do, find out what is the best for them and then go for it, never missing the right gate.

Thinking in English: An Arduous Journey

In middle school English classes, the three words I heard most often and really took to heart were vocabulary, grammar and translation. Upon entering university, a phrase I heard for the first time and have heard it numerous times since then was "think in English". Almost every English teacher I had in my first year at university made it clear that as English major students we should strive to think in English instead of in Chinese.

My teacher of the Intensive English was most adamant that we should learn to think in English. To help us, he launched an English Only Campaign in our class. He made a rule that no one should speak Chinese in the classroom and our dorms (it is common that eight students of the same sex share one dorm in Chinese universities) and whoever violated the rule had to pay a fine of 2 cents each time he/she spoke Chinese. Considering our allowance for a whole month was 800 cents, i.e. less than 24 cents a day, the fine was not small at all. I was then appointed the boy monitor, whose duty was to collect fines.

On the first day when the rule took effect, I forgot to prepare some small change. I had to send my friend to get some small change. I was so busy that day. I was just like a cashier. One of my classmates was a great talker. It seemed that his voice was always round you. He really paid for it that day. Before the morning was over, he had paid 20 cents in fine. He was so sad and frustrated that he refused to pay the fine when he was caught speaking Chinese again in the afternoon. I was so sorry for him but I knew I could not give in, because otherwise I would not be able to collect fines from others and the activity would not even survive the very first day. I was very patient and repeated dozens of times the sentence "pay the fine please". Because I did not want to be fined myself, all I said was "pay the fine, please ".

For two minutes I had been saying the same sentence when suddenly I heard a burst of laugher from other classmates. The boy I was talking to suddenly jumped onto his feet and started shouting "pay the fine please, Mr. Li." ,"Pay the fine please, Mr. Li.". When I asked what happened, they told me that I spoke "Jiu Liang Fen Qian (Just two cents)". Then he stopped shouting and proposed a deal, which was if I did not insist on him paying the fine I would not need to pay the fine myself. Of course it was rejected. Finally, both of us paid the fine, both very reluctantly.

That night, I seldom heard anyone speaking in our dorm. It was the quietest dorm that I had ever had. Whenever I looked up from what I was doing, I would meet pairs of cautious eyes looking at me. Suddenly, I found that boys had so many secrets to share. People were whispering in each others' ears. I also found that my roommates were such wonderful pantomimers. They were making all sorts of gestures to communicate. It was truly amusing to see us "talk" to each other without the benefit of using the language we took so much for granted.

When everybody was getting ready to get to bed that night, I knew it was time to call it a day. So I sat down and did the book-keeping. That day I collected over 200 cents. But then I realized that I had not even finished half of my assignments. What made me happy was that I did pretty well that day because I had only been fined two cents. "After all, it has been a long day. Time for bed." I was thinking to myself as I was climbing to my bed, the upper one of the bunk. Before I realized, "Lei Si Le (I'm so tired.)" rolled off my tongue and an excitement swept over the bedroom and the all-evening quietness was suddenly disrupted.

With the regrets of being careless at the last minute of the day, I paid the fine, went to bed and fell asleep soon. The next morning as soon as I got out of my bed, the unlucky guy who paid the biggest fine the previous day came up to me.

" Pay the fine please, Mr. Li."

" Why? I haven't said anything yet this morning. I just got up."

" You talked in Chinese... in your dream ...last night. Did you guys hear him talking in Chinese last night?"

" Yes. I even heard him snoring in Chinese," said another roommate.

"Oh Oh! It is time to find another monitor." I thought to myself.

English Only in Class

When I was in the second year of my study at the university, there was a craze for teaching young children English in China. Yet English was not offered until after grade seven in secondary schools then. But this did not stop the people in the cities from talking about finding their children a place to learn English.

In Nanjing, the city where I was attending the university at that time, there were several children's palaces, public agencies that organized all sorts of after-school academic and non-academic activities for children in the community. One of them recognized the demands of English learning for children in the society and made the quickest response to them. The director of the palace soon started a class of Children's English in the palace. The pupils in the class ranged from kindergartners to fifth graders. There were altogether thirty of them in the class. They were scheduled to meet twice a week, Tuesday and

Thursday afternoons after school. When it was time to find teachers for the class, the director decided that she would like to hire two university students to teach the class because in that way she could pay less. So she contacted the department of English in the university where I was studying then and asked the Chair to find two teachers for her. Ren, my best friend, and I, being the two top students in our grade, were then recommended and hired to teach the class together.

As neither of us had had any formal or informal teaching experience by then, we were both very nervous. However, we believed that we knew enough English to teach the kids A, B, C. Besides, we had been sitting and watching other teachers teaching for more than a decade. We agreed that there should not be any problem in teaching such a class and we should not be nervous at all.

According to our own arrangement, I was to teach the first day class. Although we had been encouraging each other for a few days, I felt tense as the hour of starting the first day class approaching. I really wished the class were not scheduled that day but the next day so that I would have an extra day to get myself ready. However, that was impossible. I just had to go and teach as scheduled.

When I entered the classroom, around thirty kids were crowding in a small classroom. They all had their English textbooks in front of them on the desks. But they were not paying attention to them. They were talking and laughing. Some of their parents were looking at the class through the windows and would smile at me to show their respect when my eyes met theirs. The palace director was also sitting in the classroom, holding a notebook and a pen in her hands. She was the last person I wanted to see in the classroom. I did not mind much about the kids' parents watching me because I believed they did not know English at all and they did not know how to teach either. But I knew

nothing about the director. "Maybe she was good at English", I thought to myself. "She must know what good teaching is like. What if she does not like my teaching? What if she caught me making grammatical mistakes in class?...."

"Ding, ding-ding, Ding, ding-ding...." I was suddenly awakened from my meandering thoughts. "Class begins." I announced in English. (My friend and I had decided that we should conduct the class, at least and better just the first class, in English as we must show the kids, their parents, the director how well we knew English. We secretly hoped that one of the three parties would come to us after the first class and ask us to conduct the class in Chinese instead of English.) "My name is Defeng Li." I wrote my name on the blackboard in Chinese. "I am a student in the Foreign Languages and Literature Department, Nanjing Normal University. I am happy to have the chance to help you learn English. ...." After my introduction, I wrote the letters A,a, B,b, C,c on the blackboard and taught the kids how to pronounce and read them. We did a lot of read-after-mes. The students enjoyed it because they could shout at the top of their voices. But when I explained how to produce these sounds, the kids were lost. I knew some Chinese would help them a lot but I decided to wait to be told.

During the break, I went out to get some fresh air and relax my nerves. I met two of the kids' parents. "Thank you for teaching our kids." They said to me. " You know English so well. Unbelievable! You can talk in English. I am sure our kids will learn English very well since they have such a wonderful teacher." Then I suddenly noticed the director was standing beside me and had been listening too. When the two parents left us, the director said to me in Chinese, "Xiao Li, eh, I am afraid the kids will not understand you if you talk only in English in class. However, never mind. You might as well use English only in class." Obviously what the parents said changed her mind.

A Success or Not

In the late spring of 1987, I was doing my practicum at a Middle School far away from Nanjing. How excited I was! After four years of hard work in the "ivory tower", I was able to use and apply into practice what I had learned. Also, the school where I was doing my practicum was in a different city. Having stayed in Nanjing for four years, I was very happy to leave for a while and to enjoy the scenery of another city. Besides, I had finished the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies and was only too glad to put aside the textbooks for some time.

The practicum was scheduled to be eight weeks, with observations of the cooperating teachers' classroom instruction in the beginning two weeks, student-teaching in the following four weeks, and evaluation of the practicum in the last two weeks.

During the fourth week of my practicum, the chair of my department in Nanjing Normal University came to visit us and brought us the results of the Examinations for Graduate Studies , which several of us were keen to know. I was very happy to learn that I got the highest score among more than one hundred candidates from different universities who sat the exams. It was another happiest day in my life because then I knew definitely that I would not be teaching in a middle school but rather in a university. Soon all the student teachers and our cooperating teachers heard the news. The cooperating teachers showed particular admiration and envy. Most of them did not even have a degree. Among them, the one with the best education was what they called a "half BA" -- the director of the Group of English Teachers in the school. Three years before, he got a sabbatical leave from the school and studied in a degree-conferring teachers' college for two years. Though he did not get a

degree for that, his colleagues all called him "half BA", which he seemed to have accepted.

The following morning when I arrived in the English teachers' office, the director came up to me.

"One of our senior teachers is ill. He will not be able to teach his classes today. We have decided that you would teach his classes for him."

Handing me a textbook, he continued.

"He teaches three senior high grade three classes (of 19-year-olds). He has two classes this morning. They'll begin in about fifty minutes."

With these words he left. Obedient as I had always been and confident in myself in handling such a class, I started to prepare for the classes. It turned out that I would introduce the subjunctive mood to the students and also cover part of the text in Lesson Five. As I was busy with the preparation, the director came to me again.

"I forgot to tell you that I am going to observe your class today. I need to fill out the evaluation form for you."

I wanted to protest that it was unfair for him to observe my lesson that day when I was suddenly assigned to teach a different class a different lesson and evaluate my teaching based upon his observations. But I didn't because I was only too aware that my protest would only make matters worse. If I dared to challenge his authority and upset him, he would never give me a good evaluation of my teaching no matter how well I taught.

As I was trying to figure out how to successfully teach the lesson, it suddenly occurred to me that what happened that morning probably had something to do with the previous day's news about my examination results. I concluded that the director was interested in finding out how well I had mastered English. Besides, from previous contacts with him, I sensed that he believed that if a person had a good command of his subject, he was no doubt a good teacher. Therefore, I decided to show him how well I knew English. The best way to do it was to teach the lesson all in English.

That morning, I strictly taught as I had planned. I explained to the students what the subjunctive mood was in the English language, how it was different from that in the Chinese language, and how the English subjunctive mood was formed differently in different situations. I conducted the class all in English. When I had to give examples in Chinese to show the differences in the subjunctive mood between the two languages, I did not say them. Instead, I wrote them on the blackboard and called on some students to read them for me and the class. In this way, I did not utter a single Chinese sound in that class.

When I was teaching, I found the students totally lost. But that was no surprise to me. I knew it before I started the lesson. As matter of fact, I doubted that the director was able to follow me because, though he was nodding his head from time to time in class, he nodded mostly at the wrong point of time. However, the students were paying attention, partly because they, like most Chinese students, had high motivation for studying English, partly because they were too curious to be distracted, for, as I later found out, this was the first time for them to see a teacher to teach an English class all in English, and partly because the powerful director was sitting in the back, watching.

When I was walking back to the English Teachers' Office with the director after the lesson, I asked him for comments on my lesson. He said it was excellent. But he would not (or could not?) go into details though I urged him to.

That afternoon, I bumped into several students in my morning class when I was playing basketball with some of my own students. I invited them to join us. As we were playing together I asked them how they liked the morning English class. They all said they were impressed with my spoken English in class, but they did not understand a single thing of what I said that morning.

"Is this a successful lesson? For me as a teacher? For the students? For the director?" I have kept asking myself till today, because I have not been able to find the answer.

"Teacher, You Do Smile"

In September 1987, I began my M.A. program in Nanjing, China. It was a time when English learning among Chinese was at its apex as the result of the country's open-door policy and market economy. The number of English learners was ever-increasing. This created a tremendous challenge for China's education. Though the Cultural Revolution had ended almost a decade before, its impact was still much felt in all aspects of the society. Education was one of the most damaged enterprises during the Cultural Revolution in China. Two salient problems were that there were not enough institutions where English learners among others could go to study and that there was a great shortage of English teachers at all levels. To help to solve these problems, the State Education Commission introduced a new system called Self-Taught Examinations. People who could not enter a regular educational institutions were encouraged to teach themselves whatever they wanted to study and would be conferred graduation certificates when they passed the State-

Administered examinations. To facilitate the Self-Taught Examinations, the State Education Commission also encouraged regular educational institutions and private parties to run related programs where possible so that Self-Taught Examination students could get some help, though they mainly rely on themselves to learn.

In 1987, one major private English training centre was set up in Nanjing where I was working on my M.A. Since there were not enough English teachers, I was one of the teachers hired to teach English at the center. The course I taught there was Intensive English Reading. I used the textbook from the centre. It was the textbook designated by the Provincial Self-Taught Examination Committee. The purpose of the course was clear in everybody's mind, which was to get over sixty points (the passing grade) in the coming State-Administered Examinations. The three major components of the Intensive English Examination were multiple-choice questions on grammar, reading comprehension, and English-Chinese translation. Accordingly, what we did in class was review the English grammar, practise English-Chinese Translation and of course a lot of reading comprehension. Most of my students were factory workers. Most them worked different shifts. Some would come directly from work while others would go directly to work when the class was over. They were very quiet in class. Everybody looked at their books and tried to copy everything I wrote on the board and take down whatever I said.

Teaching at the center was actually the first time I taught adult students. Before I started teaching there, I asked one of my professors at my university for suggestions about classroom management. He warned me that the students at the center would be very tough since they were generally those who did not pass the Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning and thus were not able to enter universities and colleges as a result of negligence in middle schools. The suggestion my professor gave me was "be strict with them from the very

first day and rule them with an iron hand" and added that that was "for the good of the students". I kept that in mind when I began teaching there. Everything went fine as expected. I was feeling very happy. I had very good control over the students who were admittedly the toughest of all in China.

One night, we were taking a break between classes. Two girl students came up to me and asked me some questions, as students often do in China. I answered their questions and they looked very happy. I asked them where they were working and why they wanted to learn English and the like. Then one of them said,

"Teacher, you do smile?!".

"Of course, I do. What do you mean 'you do smile'?" Puzzled, I asked.

"We thought you would never smile." The other girl said. "We have had the class for nearly two months now. We have never seen you smile yet."

"I remember seeing a half smile on you. Once, when you were explaining the text to us in class and you came across something funny. You were about to smile but then you suddenly stopped. We barely saw your teeth when you suddenly closed your lips." The first girl continued.

"Really. I don't believe that. Impossible." I said.

Then we all laughed.

On my way home that night, I had some time to think about this incident. I knew it was true though I still could not understand how I could have done this. I was

also amazed at how much the students would watch their teacher. Teaching is more than knowing your subject.

After this incident, I began to relax myself in class. I smiled and even laughed sometimes in class. I found I enjoyed teaching the class much more than before. The students also seemed to have better times.

Introduction

After my graduation, I started to teach English in the same university where I had studied for seven years. I was assigned to teach English reading to two freshman classes of 19-year-olds in the Foreign Languages and Literature Department.

My first classes fell on a Thursday morning. After exchanging greetings, I briefly announced what we would do in the two periods of class. My first activity for that morning was students' self-introduction in English. The primary purposes for this activity were obvious — for me as a teacher to know the students, for the students to know each other, for me to get a sense of the students' proficiency in English, for the students to talk about something they knew well so that they would not be overwhelmed or intimidated by the coming university studies and rather be helped to develop positive attitudes towards English.

The self-introduction activity went on smoothly as the students stood up and introduced themselves one after another according to their seat arrangements. The introductions were reasonably good in terms of content, but the students' English proficiency varied a great deal.

When the turn came for a girl student in the middle of the second row to introduce herself, she rose to her feet, very, very slowly. Her lack of enthusiasm

for the activity were obvious and beginning to annoy me, who had been trained in very traditional Confucian model of education.

"My name is Mao Lijuan. That's it." Scarcely had she finished the sentence when she sat down.

What a jerk! I could feel the anger rising in me and my face turning red. However, for a moment, I did not know what to do. Students in China usually go to great lengths to please their teachers and to leave a good "first impression" on them when they first meet in class. Never had I expected a girl student to react to my activity that way in the first class. She caught me really unawares. Besides, though I was eager to defend my dignity and authority as a teacher, I heard a voice asking me, "Are you sure you want to give her a real hard time in the very first class? Besides, do you know exactly how you are going to do it, how you are going to begin it and how to end it?" "But how can you let her get away with it so easily?" Another voice was right after me. "No. I can't let her go." At that moment, I suddenly realized that the student next to her was already standing there introducing himself. It seemed that it was not proper for me to stop this student and proceed with what was in my mind. Dismayed, I decided to put this aside for a while to take care of the class.

When it was time for a break, I announced to the whole class that the girl student must come to see me during the break. By that time, she must be sure that she was in trouble.

I was ready to give her a severe reprimand and some sort of punishment if necessary. To start, I gave her a chance to defend herself. She told me that she had practiced self-introduction in English for over a hundred times. When she was in middle school, her teacher had asked her and her classmates to introduce themselves in English. Before the Oral English Exam for University

Study, her teacher had prepared herself very well as to how to make a self-introduction if it turned out to be one of the exam questions and she had practiced it for dozens of times for that reason and she could practically recite her self-introduction. Then in the past few days in the new term, every teacher had asked her and her new classmates to do self-introduction. She found that she seemed never to move forward, and the self-introduction after having been repeated again and again was basically meaningless to her. Besides, teachers never introduced themselves to the students.

What she said reminded me of the reluctance and boredom I felt when I was asked to do self-introduction over and over again as a student, the difference being I was too "good" a student to show it. Her words also reminded me of the lack of enthusiasm and engagement in the self-introduction activity displayed by the students in the previous class, despite the fact that most of them introduced themselves in good detail. Though I still thought that I was well-justified to ask the students to introduce themselves to me as a teacher, I did ask myself the question, "Is there anything that I can do to make the activity more interesting and engaging for them?"

The next day, I had another group of students in class. Again I told them that as the first activity for that morning they were supposed to do an introduction. But I made three changes in the activity. Instead of introducing themselves, each of the students should introduce a classmate. To do this, they should first of all interview the person they wanted to introduce and take some notes during the interview. Another change I made was that I as a teacher was a participant in the activity as well. So I told the class that one of them would be my partner for the interview and introduction. Also, instead of sitting in their respective seats, they were encouraged to move around to find people they wanted to talk to.

The activity began, the students got up and found their partners. They were all very busy and fully engaged in the activity. After they got the information they needed, the students then introduced their partners to the whole class. The students were much more attentive and showed more interest during the introduction than the students I had the day before because they were very interested in and curious about how their partners were going to introduce them to others. The classroom was indeed a bit noisy with students' laughter and occasional talking, and the activity took longer than the previous day's introductions. But I felt good because I, like the students, had had fun in the activity.

Teach the Future Tense in English

From my observation and my experience of teaching Chinese EFL learners, I find that, on the one hand, they like English grammar because they generally find grammar helpful in their acquisition of the language; on the other hand, they usually hate grammar courses because they find them dull and uninteresting. Therefore I find it important for an EFL teacher to be innovative in their ways of presenting grammar to the students.

When I taught the future tense of the English language for the first time, I followed my teachers' model of presentation. I told the students to open their grammar textbooks to the page on the future tense and we went over the rules listed in the book and studied the given examples one by one. Usually the students were asked to read the examples and translated them into Chinese if I thought the sentences might be difficult for the students. From time to time, I would see one or two students struggling to keep their sleepy eyes open and pretend to be listening.

Seeing this was really disconcerting. I decided to make some changes about my way of teaching grammar. When I taught the future tense for the second time, I did not start with the book. Instead, I asked the students questions to elicit some English sentences. For example, I would ask them "What do you do in the late afternoon?", "What do you usually do on Sundays?", "What do I do in the evenings?" " What does your brother do on the weekend?". In response to these questions, I would get such sentences from the students:

We play basketball in the afternoon.
I read novels with my sister on Sundays.
You prepare your lessons in the evenings.
He does his homework on the weekend.

At other times, I would ask the students to tell the class in English what they do at different times every day. This could usually also generate many sentences.

After this, I would tell the students that we were going to learn how to talk about things that would happen in the future. To start, I would ask them to guess how we should say in English "Wo Men Ming Tian Da Lan Qiu. (We are going to play basketball tomorrow.)" Naturally, the students would say that they did not know because they had not learned it. At this time, I would ask them to tell me how to express future actions in Chinese. Some would suggest that we did nothing but add a time adverbial, e.g. *Ming Tian*, some would say we use the word *Jiang* to indicate actions happening in the future, and others would argue that it was inherent in the verbs themselves to refer to future actions. I would usually simply say *OK* rather than *right* or *wrong* after each new point was put forward by the students and meanwhile write them on the chalkboard. In this way, the students would have time and find motivation in themselves to explore and think more of the ways that future actions are expressed in Chinese. This would lay a firm foundation for them to build upon when the future tense in

English was presented to them. Besides, by keeping alive the suspense, this could bring in a lot of class discussion and make the class more lively for the students.

When there were no more new points coming forward, I would then summarize the ways that future actions are expressed in Chinese. First, there is more than one way. All the above suggestions are true. Second, though the word *Jiang* is sometimes used to indicate future actions in Chinese, it is more common for us to rely on adverbial phrases and action words themselves to imply future actions. In a word, "futureness" in the Chinese language is conveyed more implicitly than explicitly, the same way as we Chinese people who are more introverted than extroverted.

Then it was time to turn their attention to English future tense again. I would usually have them guess how the future tense is formed in English. Of course, again there would be a lively discussion. After we had enough discussion, I would tell them that, like Chinese, there are several ways to form the future tense in English. The most frequently used form is to place before the verb of the sentence one of the following words or phrases: *will, shall and be going to.* These words are just like the Chinese word *Jiang*, indicating a future action.

Following more explanations about when to use *will, shall* and *be going to*, I would ask the students to change the sentences they made earlier into the future tense by using will, shall or be going to, either orally or having them write on the board. Their new sentences would be like the following.

We shall/will/are going to play basketball in the afternoon.
I shall/will/am going to read novels with my sister on Sundays.
You will/are going to prepare your lessons in the evenings.
He will/is going to do his homework on the weekend.

A mistake the students would often make was that they would do nothing about the time adverbials when they converted these sentences. As matter of fact, I did not expect them to. I would then remind them that the time adverbials would have to be changed to some future time adverbials. The class would brainstorm the adverbs and adverbial phrases they had learned to express the future time. As the students called them out, I would write them on the board and the students were also told to take notes. I would also introduce some new ones for them. After this, they would be asked to replace the time adverbials in the above sentences with appropriate ones. We would get sentences such as:

We shall/will/are going to play basketball next week.
We shall/will/are going to play basketball next Tuesday.
We shall/will/are going to play basketball tomorrow afternoon.
I shall/will/am going to read novels with my sister tomorrow.
I shall/will/am going to read novels with my sister the day after tomorrow.

As "intake activities", in addition to worksheets, I would have students each bring a calendar to class. The first activity I would do with it was to pair up my students and have them look at their calendars and describe to their partners their plans for the weekend, or the next week, or the rest of the month, etc.. The second activity I would do with the calendar was a continuation of the first one. The students would then write individually a passage with a title like "My Plan for the Weekend".

"We Are So Confident Now"

Having taught English Reading for a year in China, I was assigned to teach a class of Conversation English. The students in the conversation class were actually university professors who had been selected by the government to be

sent abroad to further their studies soon. The purpose of the class was obviously to prepare them to converse in English when they got to an English-speaking country.

With this objective in mind, I did all sorts of situational dialogues with them in the first week. I thought they were very useful and that was perhaps the most they could gain in such a one-month preparation program. I was pretty happy about it.

As originally planned, my colleague did an evaluation of the students' response of my lessons at the end of the first week. I was expecting a good feedback about the lessons when I met with my colleague who had done the evaluation.

"I don't know how I should tell you." He started.

" What?" I was puzzled.

" I have just done the evaluation." He continued. "I am afraid that I'll have to disappoint you. The feedback from the students was not positive."

"Serious?" I asked.

"Yes. The students were not satisfied with your teaching. They complained that they were not learning anything because you did not teach them a lot of grammar." He went on. "Though I personally think that you are teaching the right thing for them after I learned from them what you had been doing in class, I'll have to make the suggestion that you make great changes in your lessons. We have to give them what they think they need. Otherwise we're going to lose the opportunity to run such a program again ever again."

Young in my age and my career, I knew that I must take the advice from my colleague. I threw away all my original situational dialogues. Instead, I found my old English grammar book. In the next lesson, I started by reviewing some of the grammar they had learned before. Following that I copied on to the chalkboard grammar exercises of all kinds, e.g., multiple-choice questions, fill-in-blanks with the proper forms of the verbs in brackets. After they all had a chance to complete the exercises, we would go over them one by one, explaining why a certain answer was chosen and why a certain form was used. Besides, I would explain all the new words in the exercises and ask them to translate the sentences into Chinese.

At the end of that class, two of the students in their fifties came up to me and said, "Thank you very much. We have learned so much today. We have learned more today than we learned in the previous week."

Since the students liked what I did with them, I followed the same procedure till the end of the program. At the end, the students were so happy that they all gave me presents. At the celebration of the "great success" of the program, the student who spoke for the class, concluded his speech, "Thank you very much, our teacher. Because of your hard work, we all feel we are so confident now to go to study in an English-speaking country."

The department was happy with me too. I was asked to teach the program again but I refused.

Becoming Communicative

During the ten years of teaching English in China, for all sorts of reasons I did not practice much communicative language teaching. In the summer of 1995, I had an opportunity to teach in a Korean teacher education project in Canada. I

was very happy that I could teach English using the Communicative Approach since the difficulties that had hindered me from using it in China were no longer existent for me there and then.

It so happened that the several organizers of the program often co-teach a class. So we the instructors often planned a lesson together. As always, before devising an activity, we tried to articulate the objectives of this lesson so that we were all clear about our goals and also would be able to tell the project participants in class. We agreed that the objectives of the lesson were to: (1) to get the participants to talk in English so that they could improve their English, particularly listening and speaking abilities; (2) to give the participants a chance to be exposed to CLT; (3) to find out what their expectations were for the program; (4) to find out what help they might need while they were staying in Canada. With this shared understanding, we designed a communicative activity.

To begin the activity, we placed twenty postcards in the middle of the classroom. There were altogether five kinds of them, with every four being identical in pictures and colors. Then we asked the participants each to choose one for himself or herself. The four people who selected the same postcards formed one group. The whole class was then split into five groups, with one in the middle and the other four each occupying a corner of the classroom. Inside the postcards were the same set of guiding questions:

Why have you chosen this card?
What are your expectations of the teacher education project?
What are you afraid of in Canada?

Each group was required to take notes on chart paper during their discussion so that they could later share their highlights of their discussions with the whole class. With these instructions the groups started to work.

After the activity began, it turned out that all the organizers but me had to leave on other errands. I was left behind to hold the floor.

As I was walking around facilitating the activity, I sadly found that most of the Korean teachers were talking in Korean and even those who were fairly competent in English were speaking Korean to each other too. I tried to urge them to talk in English. Then as I was checking from group to group, another thing started to be puzzling me. Each group put down sentences like "We want to improve our English, especially our speaking and listening abilities". But they just would not practise speaking in English. I could not understand why? I asked them why but they did nothing but simply smile at me.

After much urging from me, more participants started to try speaking English, which made me happier. Naturally, as they were trying to use English in their discussion, some would ask me for help when they could not find a word or phrase to express themselves. Seeing them making efforts to improve their English, I was only too happy to help them. I told them the words they were looking for and taught them phrases that would better convey what they wanted to say. They were grateful and I felt good.

Then some participants started to write down what they wanted to say on a piece of paper and asked me whether they had made any mistakes in their sentences. Thus I read their sentences and pointed out the mistakes in them and helped them improve the sentences. Gradually, more and more people wrote down what they wanted to say and asked me to go over it for them. As a result, I was so busy helping around that I did not even have a minute break.

No sooner had I finished helping individuals with their sentences than one of the groups called to me. They would like me to go over what they had written down on the chart paper for possible grammatical mistakes and ill-constructed sentences before the coming class report. I was pretty tired and thirsty by then. But helping students in need is a teacher's responsibility. I did not hesitate at all. I read what they had written down and pointed out the grammatical mistakes and helped them make the necessary changes. I had scarcely finished with the first group when two other groups asked me to help them as they did not want to let the whole class see their mistakes and poor sentences. By the time I had finished with the fifth group, the class was already overtime. Quickly I dismissed the class as they had other commitments that evening.

The class was over. The Korean teachers left. I had worked hard as a teacher. However, I just did not feel good at all. As I was alone by myself putting things away in the classroom, I had time to reflect upon the session that had just ended. For a moment, I concluded the class I had just had was a failure because I did not see the picture I had had in my mind before the class: everybody was very excited at the idea of communicating in English, English was flowing out of the learners' mouths mingled with laughter and lively debates.... Besides, the passive resistance from the participants and my excessive readiness to correct their English, which I had become so used to doing in class after many years of teaching in China, made me sad. However, on second thought, the session might not be so bad at all. First, I had achieved the two goals of the four we had set for the session as I learnt from them what they expected in this program and where they would need most help from us while they were staying here. Also, they had some chances to practice English listening and speaking though not as much as I expected. To some extent they had also had a chance to be exposed to CLT. I had had my first trial in using the Communicative Approach and this experience made me realize that to

successfully apply the Communicative Approach in your practice is much more than a change in the practitioner's philosophy of language learning and teaching. The session I had had would certainly help me to be successful in the future.

Smoking Song

In the Korean Teacher Education Project in Canada, the participants were nineteen secondary school EFL teachers from South Korea. They studied in Canada for a month. Their major purposes were to improve their English proficiency (particularly listening and speaking abilities), to learn English culture (mainly Canadian culture since they studied in Canada), and, last but not at all least, to enjoy the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

In the first class, we organized an activity called The Name Game. It was designed to help the participants and the instructors to get to know one another and hopefully remember each other's names, to get the students to talk in English and meanwhile for the instructors to get an idea of the level of the participants' English proficiency.

To start, we arranged the seats in a circle with the instructors sitting among the participants. Then we wrote the word "alliteration" on the board and asked the group what that word meant. After some negotiation among them they got its meaning. To make sure everyone in the group understood, I asked them to give an example. Several of them said something very fast, followed by a series of laughter. I did not know what they were saying because they were talking in Korean. However, from the rhythms and the laughter that accompanied what they had said, I speculated they had said some funny Korean tongue twisters. Fortunately, one of them was able to give an example in English: "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers". This obviously reminded another Korean

teacher in the group, who gave another example: "Sally sells seashells by the seashore", and then commented that they had these twisters in their English textbooks to train the learners' pronunciation instead of introducing the concept of alliteration.

After every one had got a clear understanding of the concept of alliteration, we announced that every one should think of an adjective that would alliterate with his/her first name. To help the Korean teachers, we gave examples such as Beautiful Betty, Diligent Dick, Marvelous Martin. Considering that it might be quite difficult to find an adjective that would alliterate with the teachers' first names, we decided that we would allow them to use their last names if they would and also we would allow for participles or gerunds if they could not find a suitable adjective. Examples were also offered to help the teachers to follow us: Kind Kim (Kim is a common Korean last name), Listening Lee (participle was used instead of adjective since there are not many adjectives beginning with L in English and we realized that several Korean teachers had Lee in their names).

When every one had thought of a "game name", we told them how we should proceed with the activity. Every one of the group would tell his/her name to the whole group. While he/she was telling the group his/her game name, he/she should also act it out by performing an action to convey the meaning of the adjective or participle. After that, the whole group would say his/her new name together and imitate what he or she just did for his/her performance. Following this, the person would be given an opportunity to explain why he/she had chosen this name and sometimes explain how his/her performance conveyed the meaning. Others would also be given a chance to ask questions related to his name or action. Then the group would repeat all the names they had heard and the actions they had seen before moving to the next person.

After such explanation, the activity was about to begin. To make it less stressful for the participants, we arranged for one of the instructors to start. Her excellent demonstration made the Korean teachers feel reassured. The activity went on very well. The adjectives people found for themselves were often quite amusing, like Mysterious Myonghui, Yellow Yonghuing, Killing Kim. The awkwardness accompanying the actions supposed to convey the meanings of the chosen names was also always a source of hearty laughter.

While the activity was going on and we were enjoying the laughter, I noticed that one of the men teachers appeared to be losing attention from time to time. I often found him looking up at the wall facing him. Soon his turn came. He produced a packet of Korean cigarettes out of his pocket, took one out, put it in one corner of his mouth, lit it up, and took a deep inhale. "I am Smoking Song." he said, smoke coming out of his nose and mouth. Several other men teachers watched him covetously. As smoking was not allowed inside the building, we had to send him out immediately. Then it dawned on me that there was a clock on the wall and he had been looking at it because he wanted a break so that he could have a smoke. Thinking that it had been quite some time since the beginning of the class and thinking that there might be another one or two smokers in the group, we decided those who had to smoke could go to smoke outside of the building and the rest might as well stay and finish the activity since we were about to finish. After an exchange of a few words among the Korean teachers, the men teachers started to leave. A minute later, I was surprised to find there were no men teachers left in the class. We all had to have a break right away.

When I went out to find the men teachers, they were blowing a cloud of smoke by the side gate of the building.

"Psychological Problems"

When I was teaching in the Korean Teacher Education Project in the summer of 1995, it so happened that I needed to visit some of the K-TEP members at their dorms one evening. When I was sitting there chatting with a group of eight Korean teachers, one of them suggested that they should do something constructive in the long Edmonton evenings and maybe they should have another session in the evenings too so that they could make best of their time here in Canada. Naturally, there were a few teachers who disagreed. As the discussion went on, another teacher suggested that, instead of sitting here arguing in vain, we should give it a try right away, and that I should teach them a lesson since I was there. Upon such a motion, those who disagreed earlier joined those who wanted an evening session. One major reason for this change of mind was, I believe, that they knew that this would be an once-and-for-all evening class which would not continue thereafter even if there was one that night. I also suspected that an element of politeness was involved in this sudden change of mind. They did not want to give me the wrong impression with their resistance to an evening class that they thought my teaching was not worth attending. As a result, the two sides together insisted that indeed I should give them a lesson.

After being away from teaching for a year and a half, I was really happy about being asked to teach in spite of the informality of the occasion. In fact, I really felt a strong urge in me to teach them. However, I knew whom I was dealing with and had some idea about their culture as a result of a fairly extensive contact with South Koreans in the previous Korean Teacher Education Project. First of all, I told myself that I must make sure they were sincere in their request in asking me to teach them. Besides, to conform to their (and also my own culture), I tried to decline by saying something like, though I might agree with some of them that they should have an (informal) evening session, they should

find a better qualified teacher, for example a native English speaker, to teach them. As the reader may be able to predict, they held their position that I should teach them.

Reluctantly, I asked them what they wanted me to teach them. "Anything" was the answer. When they said anything, I believed they really meant it. It could range from teaching them English, to English teaching methods, to Canadian culture, and to where to see the "famous" strip bars. I knew I could not be totally wrong in assuming some of them (men) really wanted me to tell them where and how to find the strip bars. They had asked me about it several times. Two of them even asked me just a little while earlier that evening. (I told them I did not know but they did not believe me.) One of the men teachers was even bright enough as to suggest with a mysterious smirk that I should teach them some Canadian culture despite the fact that I was busy learning it myself at that time.

This evident need of the students did not make me concede in this matter. In fact, even if I had conceded, I would not have been able to teach them at all because I had not the least expertise in this respect of the Canadian culture, then and now. But this incident led me to consider when, where and how and to what extent for a teacher to meet the students' needs, and also what an ESL/EFL teacher and teacher educator's subject matter content knowledge should consist of.

Nevertheless, the Korean teacher's remark about culture did remind me of an incident that had happened two days before. Though the Korean teachers had been in Canada for only a few days, they somehow learned that three of the five project organizers were single and well beyond the usual marriage age in the Korean culture. On the fourth afternoon, the sixth organizer of the project came to the class for the first time and made arrangements about the part she needed to take care of. After finishing her formal instruction, she decided to

spend some time mingling with the Korea teachers. A group of Korean teachers soon gathered around her and they started chatting. The topic soon changed to families. After this organizer had explored the Korean teachers' families, a Korean teacher seized a chance and began to ask her about her family.

"How many kids do you have?" He started with this question.

"Well, I haven't got any kids. I am not married" she answered.

"Why?" several teachers asked in unison, obviously surprised and puzzled.

"Well, eh, I don't have kids of my own. But my two sisters were both married. One has two daughters, and the other has a son and a daughter. They often come and stay with..."

She had hardly finished the sentence when a few voices sounded again.

"Why aren't you married?"

" Well, well, ... Ok. The reason is that I have a job. My job is so satisfying that I do not feel I need a husband or a family."

"Good for her," Relieved, I thought to myself. "Fortunately, she was smart enough to find a reason for her inquisitors."

Upon recalling this incident, I decided to teach them some Canadian culture. To teach this lesson of Canadian culture, I decided to use mainly two important strategies: story-telling and reflection.

I then started with the following story.

A friend of mine once taught English in an Engineering Institute in China. She was around forty then and she was single. In Chinese culture, she was a "problem old girl" as she had way passed her golden marriage age (20-26 years old). Naturally, all her Chinese colleagues, including the dean of her department, and her students became very interested in her "problem". The students never dared to ask her for reasons but her Chinese colleagues were not so sparing. They would ask her why she was not married at her age whenever they had an opportunity. She offered all sorts of excuses. Unfortunately, her colleagues in China were too bright to believe her. She was puzzled. She could not understand why her colleagues were so fussy about her being not married, why people would be so interested in her personal affairs, why her colleagues of such a nation known for politeness intruded upon her privacy. This thing really bothered her. All the fun she had in China seemed to have been ruined by it which seemed to be following her wherever she went. She decided that she would never be able to get away from her Chinese colleagues with some perfunctory excuses. She needed to settle this thing once and for all with some serious explanations.

One afternoon, as she was reading in her foreign expert guesthouse apartment, the dean of her department happened to be passing outside. She decided to explain the whole thing to him and hoped that he would be able to pass on the explanation to her colleagues. So she invited him in.

"Mr. Gao, people in this department seem to be very interested in the fact that I am not married at my age." She started. " I hope I can explain the whole thing to you so that you can, and also help your staff understand me."

"Oh, the thing about your marriage. Don't worry. Be happy. I have told my Chinese colleagues that the reason for your not being married was that you have psychological problems."

Psychological problems! At these words, she collapsed, crying bitterly.

When I finished the story, the Korean teachers' responses were overwhelming. Besides asking for clarification of the parts they missed or did not understand, they raised all sorts of questions, including why my friend was not married at her age. One of the teachers who had gained some knowledge of the Canadian values of families after being in Canada for a few days was in fact able to offer an reasonably good answer from the perspective of cultural differences. Several of them were able to make connections to their own experiences and try to understand those puzzling experiences form the cultural perspective. For example, several of the men mentioned that they were questioned whether they were gays by several Canadians when they were walking together hand in hand somewhere downtown the night before. They tried to look for the possible cultural differences that had led to such misunderstanding. They said they felt much better when they could somehow understand why that happened. What I liked most was that two of the people confessed that they might have made the sixth project organizer very uncomfortable by pursuing an answer to the question why she was not married and realized that it might not be proper to ask a woman about her marriage in the Western culture.

As the discussion went on, Korean teachers were able to distance themselves from the concrete incidents and asked these questions which generated another series of discussions:

What does this story tell us about ESL/EFL teachers?

What roles does culture play in ESL/EFL learning and teaching?

How does one teach culture in ESL/EFL classes?

How do ESL/EFL teachers raise their cultural awareness and sharpen their cultural sensitivity?

How do ESL/EFL teachers learn the English culture?

The Purpose of the Stories

"Mind is never free of precommitment. There is no innocent eye, nor is there one that penetrates aboriginal reality. There are instead hypotheses, versions, expected scenarios." (Bruner, 1988, p. 582). It is hoped that the reader of these stories, apart from gaining a sight of the complexities of China's English teaching, will also see the development of me as a second language teacher, the sort of joys and frustrations I have had in my teaching, the kind of teaching I did in China and how the education in Canada has changed me and affected me in my perception of language learning and teaching and language teacher education. This is important because my past experience and my understanding of language learning and teaching have inevitably affected the way this study has been done. Thus the reader is cautioned to keep them in mind when reading this study.

The Present Study

Statement of the Problem

Communicative language teaching has been hailed as a revolution in ESL/EFL teaching methodology. It has achieved a solid base of widely-accepted principles setting it apart from previous paradigms (Whitley, 1993). In the last fifteen years, drawing from their experiences of experimenting with CLT in EFL countries and/or their expertise in second/foreign language education,

scholars have been debating about the appropriateness and feasibility of applying CLT in EFL classrooms. Some have emphasized the local needs and EFL conditions of the EFL countries, and the importance and the success of the traditional methods of language teaching (Sampson, 1984; Harvey, 1985; Rajul, 1986). Others have taken a strong position for adopting CLT in Asian countries (Li, 1984; Maley 1984). However, the majority in this debate have argued that neither of the above extremist positions will benefit English learning and teaching in Asian countries. They have recognized that it is difficult for Asian countries to adopt CLT completely, given the current English teaching circumstances in those countries and accordingly made the proposal of negotiating CLT in traditional settings after overcoming certain barriers (Littlewood, 1984; Mosback, 1984; Sano et al., 1984; Gonzalez, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 1985; Spencer, 1986; Chau and Chung, 1987; Ting, 1987; White 1989; Ellis, 1994; Li, 1996; Rao, 1997).

After a decade of discussion, most Asian countries have not moved much further towards a more communicative approach in English language teaching, although the degree of movement varies from country to country. In China, despite these urgings from researchers home and abroad that CLT must be introduced into English teaching, traditional methods still dominate the EFL today. Why has CLT had such a difficult time in getting into Chinese EFL classrooms? An investigation into the exact difficulties (social, political, economic, cultural and so on) that EFL teachers in China have and might encounter in their attempt to introduce CLT can be very informative and provide guidance as to how to introduce CLT in EFL contexts more effectively and efficiently, hence to effect real changes in English teaching and render local practitioners real help.

Focus of the Study

This study focuses on the following questions:

1. What problems are inherent in English teaching in China?
2. What can communicative language teaching contribute to English teaching in China?
3. How feasible is communicative language teaching in China?
4. What are the difficulties that Chinese English teachers have had and might have had in their attempts to use CLT? Can these difficulties be overcome? How and to what extent?

Significance of the Study

Although there has been some literature on CLT in China, most of it was written by non-Chinese English teachers who had spent a year or two teaching in China (for example, White, 1989; Harvey, 1985; Anderson, 1993). They usually draw from their experience of teaching in the country and debate the appropriateness of implementing CLT in China. But data-supported studies on this topic are small in number. Besides, due to limited understanding of the Chinese culture and insufficient understanding of the complexities of Chinese English teaching, their writings often produce in the reader a feeling of, to use a Chinese idiom, "scratching your itching feet with thick rubber boots on (*ge xue sao yang*)". Their conclusions are often oversimplified.

This study listened to the Chinese English teachers and heard what they had to say about English teaching and CLT in China. The participants were teachers with deep understanding of both the culture and the complexities and dynamics of English teaching in China. It is anticipated that the findings from this study

will be more relevant to English teaching in China and provide guidance for implementation of CLT in China.

Also the literature has overwhelmingly focused on English teaching at the tertiary level in China. English teaching in the secondary schools and elementary schools has been so far overlooked. This has weakened all the claims in regard to the applicability and feasibility of CLT in China. This study takes an overall perspective. Not only the teachers at the tertiary level, who are the "front line troops" (Sun and Burnaby, 1989) were included in the study, but equal stress was also laid upon English teachers and English teaching of both secondary and elementary schools, who had until now, if not completely forgotten, seldom been included in such studies.

In addition, China claims the most English as foreign language learners in the world and has the largest scale of English teaching. Thus the findings of this study will be useful to the overall implementation of CLT in EFL situations in other countries, and also provide insights into the project of transferring teaching methodology into a different context.

Assumptions

It is assumed that understanding the introduction of CLT into China is important for public school English teaching in China.

It is assumed that CLT has so far not been able to find its way into Chinese English teaching because of the difficulties that it has posed for Chinese English teachers in the public system, and that by understanding their difficulties better, decisions can be made as to the implementation.

It is assumed that teachers teaching at universities and secondary schools and elementary schools may respond differently to questions about CLT. Therefore teachers at different levels were asked to participate in the study.

It is assumed that teachers teaching English majors and non-English majors (e.g. engineering students) may respond differently to the questions. Therefore teachers teaching both kinds of students were invited to participate in the study.

It is assumed that teachers teaching junior and senior middle schools may respond differently to the questions. Therefore teachers from both categories were invited to participate in the study.

It is assumed that all participants of the study provided true and accurate information.

It is assumed that commonly used abbreviations for communicative language teaching (CLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and others will communicate to readers of this study.

Delimitations and Limitations

For practical reasons, this study only involved public institutions in China. Private ones were not included in the present study.

For practical reasons, the study only involved teachers teaching in urban settings. Teachers teaching in rural areas were not included in the study.

Only English as a foreign language teachers are studied, excluding teachers of other languages as a foreign language from the study.

Since the study was a case study, it only involved a small number of teachers. Therefore generalization of the findings of this study was not sought.

Considering the oral English competence of most Chinese English teachers, the interviews were done in Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English though the participants were not at all discouraged from conversing in English. There were two obvious advantages to this choice. First, the participants did not need to worry about how to say something in English. They felt much less anxiety in talking with me in Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English than otherwise. Also, to speak in Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English enabled the participants to concentrate on their thoughts and thus provide accurate information for the study.

However, the final report is in English. So in writing the report, the data collected were translated into English. Loss in translation is always inevitable. But I have had formal training in English vs. Chinese translation (I did my M.A. in translation) and have had much experience with translation. This has enabled me to reduce the loss in translation to the minimum. Nevertheless, I have asked a new Ph.D graduate from the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta who was competent in both English and Chinese and familiar with educational research to check my translations (see Appendix B for an example of the translation used in this study).

Ethical Considerations

Participating teachers were informed about the study, why it was being done and what would happen to the results of the study. They were also given an opportunity to ask questions and to offer suggestions. The anonymity and confidentiality of the study were emphasized. Also the right to choose to be part of the study or not and the right to opt out of the study at any time during the

study were discussed. Consent forms restating this information were signed before the study began (See Appendix A). This study was given the approval of the Department of Secondary Education Ethics Review Committee.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the present chapter I have shared with the reader some of the reflective teaching stories that I have written over the last year. Next I have introduced and stated the problem of the research, followed by a description of the four major research questions and the significance of the study. The present chapter has also outlined the assumptions, delimitations, limitations and ethical considerations involved in the present study. The remainder of the study is organized as follows.

Chapter Two presents a review of the related literature. The review is divided into three sections and begins with an overview of English teaching in China. The second section examines CLT as the most recent development in ESL/EFL teaching methodology. In the third section, a review of the current studies dealing with the whole idea of implementing CLT in English teaching in China and in other EFL countries as well.

Chapter Three describes the research design used in the study. It includes a description of the methodological procedures used in data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four begins with a brief introduction to each of the six research participants. Six themes of the research findings of the study are then presented. A revisit of the four research questions constitute the third section of the chapter. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Finally, in Chapter Five, the findings of the study are discussed. Based upon the findings and discussion, implications are presented in the second section of the chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review begins with an overview of English teaching in China to provide the background to this study. The second section of this chapter examines CLT as the most recent development in ESL/EFL teaching methodology. The third, the most immediately relevant, encompasses studies on the necessity, feasibility and the explanations of transplanting CLT into China and other EFL situations.

An Overview of English Teaching in China

This section is the background to the study which includes the when's, why's and how's of English learning and teaching in China. It is presented here to provide context for the choices made in this study.

A Brief History of English Teaching in China

English teaching in China can be traced back to the early 1700's (Mok, 1951), when pidgin English developed in Guanzhou to facilitate the growing trade between England and China. But the first formal effort to teach English was begun by the Protestant missionary Robert Morrison, possibly as early as 1807 (Mok, 1951). To learn Chinese, he struck friendships with local Chinese traders and began to exchange language classes.

In 1835 the first missionary school was founded in China. Since then there was a steady increase in the number of missionary schools in this country (Ford 1988). In 1858 and 1860 a series of unequal treaties were forced on China by Western imperial countries. Besides opening five more ports to foreigners and extending extraterritoriality, these treaties guaranteed protection to Christian

missionaries and their converts and thus brought about the mushrooming of missionary schools in China.

According to Ford (1988), English was taught in a majority of these missionary schools. The pressure to teach English came from both sides: the missionary schools and the students. Among the missionaries, there were few if any who spoke Chinese. To teach the gospel to their Chinese students and win Chinese converts, the missionaries pushed for English teaching in these schools. Chinese students, eager to read the Bible themselves, were also highly motivated to learn English. As Ford (1988) points out, the teaching of English at Christian colleges was "spurred by expediency as well as any purposive interest" (p. 20).

The unequal treaties in 1858 and 1860 also mandated that all future agreements that the Western imperial countries would sign with China must be rendered in a foreign language, either English, French, or German, depending on the nation involved. To train a corps of reliable English interpreters and translators who could be trusted with this important task, the Qing government changed its attitude from complete rejection of English to initiation of government translators schools (*Tong Wen Guan*). In the translator schools, English was an important part of the curriculum. Despite the support from the then government, these schools were never successful, mainly because students at these translation schools found no motivation to study English since they could not see any practical use of the "inferior language" of the "barbarian" (Ford, 1988).

In 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded, all foreign missionary schools and colleges were taken over by the Chinese communist Party. The importance of English was drastically reduced in China, especially during the 1950s when the cold war chilled Sino-American relations and the

Soviet influence was at its height. During this time, Russian became the primary foreign language taught in China, with English a distant second. With the takeover of the missionary schools, the New China drove almost all the foreign teachers out of the country. Chinese nationals became the English teaching contingent.

After the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, English reemerged as the primary foreign language in China. English was given top priority in recognition of its increasing popularity around the world. Starting at that time, secondary and college students were required to study a foreign language, preferably English. But when the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, the study of anything foreign reached its nadir in modern Chinese history.

The year 1976 marked a new era in English teaching in China. After the death of Mao Ze-dong and the overthrow of the Gang of Four, China made an abrupt shift away from the policies of the Cultural Revolution. In the beginning of the 1970s, China had begun to seek contacts with foreign countries and one of the results was U.S. President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States in 1979. This dramatically altered the status of English language teaching in China.

Along with more and more students returning to the classroom from the Cultural Revolution, English was again one of the major subjects in secondary schools and colleges. When the National Entrance Examination for Higher Learning was restored in 1978 under the influence of Deng Xiaoping, English was included as one of the six tested subjects. There was a great demand for English teachers. Many people who had been teaching Russian were reassigned to teach English after a brief training. With the open door policy, foreign teachers were brought in to help teach English, though mostly at the tertiary level.

Despite the fluctuations that English learning and teaching has experienced since the Chinese Communist Party proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the goal of English learning remained constant. Price (1979) points out that the goal of Chinese English curriculum was for students to acquire a working knowledge of the language, without acquiring foreign ideas. The purpose of learning English had been to make use of English "to serve the motherland" and eventually "to make foreign things serve China".

However, following Deng's initiation of the open-door policy and later the introduction of the market economy coupled with the influx of Western ideas into China, the purpose of English learning has experienced a qualitative change in China. While to make use of English "to serve the country" still remains the official slogan for learning English, English learners tend to have their own personal purposes for learning English. If learning English was a collective and spiritual undertaking before the open door policy, it is now an individualistic and materialistic effort.

With China becoming increasingly open to the outside world and its rapid economic development, many career opportunities appeared for young people in addition to getting the assigned jobs upon graduating from colleges and universities. For instance, since the mid-1980s, many China-foreign joint ventures and foreign companies have been built in China which hire local staff. English is often one of the requirements when these companies hire new people. Because they generally offer much higher salaries than Chinese companies, they are very attractive to young people. Also, with China becoming increasingly open to the West, tourism has grown very fast in China. English has again been one of the requirements when tourist companies hire people. In addition, there have been more official and unofficial cultural exchanges

between China and the West. All this has attracted people to English classrooms. Many young workers come to English classes after the day's eight-hour work. Many of them might not even be sure about what they are going to do with English. They want to get prepared and be more competitive when opportunities turn up. Ford (1988) summarizes the purposes of English learning in China during this period in the following words:

> ... Chinese give many reasons for studying English. Many do it out of curiosity about the rest of the world, especially the developed nations of North America and Western Europe. Others hope to find lucrative jobs in the growing tourist and foreign trade industries. Some harbor dreams of going abroad to study or even to live permanently... (p. 3).

Today, English learning and teaching is operating on a unprecedented scale in China. There are more English schools than ever before. Both public and private sectors are involved in providing English teaching service to the public (for a study of Chinese community-based EFL programs, see Xie and Derwing, 1996). There are more English learners than any time in history in China. They are also much more motivated than in the past. While politics and relations to other nations have always played an important role in the status of English and English teaching in China, economic development has never been so influential as today. Considering that China is only at the early stage of political and economic development, English learning and teaching will most probably have ongoing importance.

How English Has Been Taught in China

Immersion, grammar-translation, the direct method, the audiolingual method and a blend of all these methods plus CLT have been used in English teaching at different times in China.

Formal school English teaching started in China as early as in 1840s. It is difficult to construct a precise picture of how English was taught in those early years because there is not much recording of it. However, we do know that the purpose for the missionary schools to teach English was to teach the Gospel in English to Chinese and win over Chinese converts. The pragmatic goal of communicating in English was apparent. Also, the English teachers in missionary schools were foreign monolingual English speakers. They were not likely to use much Chinese in the classroom. How English was taught in these schools can probably be best described as immersion (Ross, 1993), but without any contemporary connotation of oral communication in use.

However, "immersion" in this context is different from what is now best known as the French immersion model in Canada. First, unlike the French immersion programs which mostly start in elementary schools, the missionary schools and government translator schools in China were mostly at the secondary and tertiary levels. In French immersion programs, students learn a range of subjects all in French, which is a language of instruction not the object of instruction; while in missionary schools and government translator schools in China, the content of teaching would be the Gospel or other related subject matter. Third, in today's French immersion programs, students do a lot of activities in French to learn the subjects and the language; in missionary schools and government translator schools in China, the classes were most likely to be more highly structured. The teacher was the authority and the students were passive recipients of knowledge in the classroom.

Even later in government translator schools established by the Qing government, foreign teachers were hired because no Chinese was found who "embodied both the gentlemanly disposition of the Confucian generalist and the specialized skill of the foreign language expert" (Ross, 1993, p. 23). It is

highly likely that English was taught in a way similar to that in missionary schools.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, foreign language teaching received its influence from Russia, the big brother of China. The grammar-translation method dominated foreign language (including English) teaching in China. The goal of English study was to read and appreciate its literature. It was believed that through the study of the English grammar, the students would become more familiar with and sensitive to the grammar of their own language, Chinese, and thus would be able to write and speak Chinese better. It was also hoped that the study of the English language would be conducive to the students' intellectual development (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

Driven by this goal, reading and writing were the major focus of English learning and teaching; little attention was paid to speaking or listening. Grammar was emphasized. Students were first presented with a detailed analysis of the English grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of English. Accuracy was emphasized as well. Students were expected to attain high standards in translation. The sentence was the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Vocabulary was based solely on the reading texts and words were taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study and memorization. Chinese was the language of instruction and "maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language" (Stern, 1983, p. 455). Class work was highly structured, with the teacher controlling all activities.

In late 1950s, through the effort of a Chinese language educator, the direct method was first introduced into English language teaching in China. Yet it

must be noted that the direct method was much used in combination with the grammar-translation method mostly at the tertiary level. The grammar-translation method remains dominant in secondary schools even today.

Convinced that language is primarily what is spoken and only secondarily written (Brooks, 1964), teachers using the direct method insisted that students should hear the language before seeing it in written form. The principal goal of English learning and teaching was to communicate in the language. Common, everyday speech in English was the major content of English learning. Students also studied culture consisting of the history and geography of the English-speaking people and their customs. They were told to directly associate meaning with English, i.e. to think in English. In order to do this, the teacher demonstrated the meaning through the use of pictures, objects and demonstrations when introducing a new word or phrase. Vocabulary was emphasized over grammar. Grammar was taught inductively, that is, the students were presented with examples from which they would figure out the rules or generalization (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). English was the language of instruction. No translation into Chinese was allowed in class.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as the result of the open-door policy and the restoration of English as the dominant foreign language, the audiolingual method was introduced into China. It soon gained much popularity among younger teachers at tertiary institutions and some urban secondary schools. It has become more and more popular since then. Today it is the most widely used method in English teaching in Chinese universities and colleges. Some secondary school English teachers have started to show interest in it.

Teachers who use the audiolingual method insist that students must form new habits in the English language. The habits of the students' native language Chinese are thought to interfere with the students' attempts to master English.

Therefore, English is the only language used in the classroom. Students are presented with new vocabulary and structures through dialogues, which are learned through imitation and repetition. Drills such as repetition, chain, substitution, transformation and question and answer are conducted based on the patterns until the students are able to produce them spontaneously.

Almost at the same time as the audiolingual method was introduced in China, CLT was also brought into China. The introduction of CLT into China has been achieved mainly through the efforts of the foreign language teachers and educators who were then teaching in China (circa 1985). One major group of language educators was sent to China by the British Council. There were also Fulbright Scholars from the United States. In addition, there were language experts from other English-speaking countries such as Canada and Australia. They were all sent to China as English language teaching methodologists to help train Chinese teachers with English teaching methodology. Many teacher retraining programs and centers staffed by foreign language specialists were set up and teachers from different tertiary institutions were recruited to study there. For many foreign teacher educators, CLT was supposed to be the focus of the teacher training programs and centers. However, the Chinese teachers who attended these programs had different expectations for such programs; They wanted to have ESL lessons rather than methodology courses. The discrepancy in Chinese and foreign teachers' expectations at least partially explained why, despite many related efforts, CLT has not been popularized in China and its use has been limited to some privileged universities in the domain of the public schools and institutions.

Summary

Chinese English teaching has had a history of over 150 years. It had experienced fluctuations over the years as the political atmosphere varied in

the country. Accordingly, the purposes of English learning and teaching changed also from preaching and reading the Gospel in early missionary schools, to making foreign things serve China after the Chinese Communist Party took over the country in 1949 and to today's individual and more materialistic goals of mastering the language. Nevertheless, the teaching method that has been most widely used in China has been the traditional grammar-translation method. Other methods such as the direct method and the audiolingual method have been used in combination with it but has never replaced its dominant role in the country. CLT as the most recent progress in L2 teaching methodology has been introduced in China but has rarely been used in the public schools and institutions. Yet there seems to be an indication that it has been more widely used in the newly-established private and community-based English programs (See Xie and Derwing 1996 for a recent study of community-based English programs in China).

Communicative Language Teaching

A Brief History

Communicative language teaching is today one of the most widely practiced second/foreign language teaching methods in the world, particularly in North America. Its origins, however, are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. Until then, situational language teaching had been the major British approach to teaching English as a second/foreign language. In situational language teaching, language was taught through practicing basic language structures in meaningful situation-based activities (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). In the mid-1960s, British applied linguists began to call into question the theoretical assumptions of the situational language teaching:

> By the end of the sixties it was clear that the situational approach ... had run its course. There was no future in continuing to pursue the chimera of predicting language on the basis of situational events. What was required was a closer study of the language itself and a return to the traditional concept that utterances carried meaning in themselves and expressed the meanings and intentions of the speakers and writers who created them (Howatt, 1984, p. 280).

While the prominent American linguist Noam Chomsky leveled criticism at the structural linguistic theory for its incapability of accounting for the fundamental characteristic of language – the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences, British applied linguists emphasized another fundamental dimension of language that was inadequately addressed in the language teaching theories at that time – the functional and communicative potential of language. Drawing on the work of British functional linguists (e.g. John Firth, M. A. K. Halliday) and American work in sociolinguistics (e.g. Dell Hymes, John Gumperz, and William Labov), and philosophy (e.g. John Austin and John Searle), they argued that language teaching needs to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.

The work of the British applied linguists found support in the Council of Europe at that time. With the increasing interdependence of European countries, the Council showed great interest in developing alternative methods of language teaching to teach adults the major languages of the European Common Market. In 1971 a group of scholars began to investigate the possibility of developing a language course on a unit-credit system, a system in which learning tasks are broken down into "portions or units, each of which corresponds to a component of a learner's needs and is systematically related to all the other portions" (Van Ek and Alexander, 1980, p. 6). They mainly used studies of the needs of European language learners, and in particular a document prepared by Wilkins (1972), which proposed a functional and communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. The Council of

Europe incorporated his semantic/communicative analysis into a set of specifications for first-level communicative language syllabus.

Although the movement began as a largely British innovation, focusing on alternative conceptions of a syllabus, the scope of CLT has expanded since the mid-1970s. "Both American and British proponents now see it as an approach (and not a method) that aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

Communicative Competence

Chomsky, an advocate of a theory of language as communication (Chomsky, 1959, 1971, 1975), proposes that the linguistic studies of a language should go beyond the linguistic structures and levels in the target language as advocated by the structuralist linguists, and look into the language in action when it is used as the instrument of communication. He believes that studies of this sort will lead to characterization of the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically flawless sentences in a language (Chomsky, 1965). Chomsky proposes the notion of a "language organ" which he calls the "language acquisition device (LAD)". He believes that it is this device that enables a person to acquire a language and it deteriorates with age. Little is yet known about its full implications in second language teaching. Bruner (1978a) feels that the notion of LAD is a "powerful idea, one that we will have to revisit after other aspects of language become clearer" (p. 43). Chomsky has never made claims about second language acquisition and teaching, however his views of language indirectly question the value of applying behaviorism to second language teaching. For this, Bruner (1978b)

praises him for "freeing us from the paralyzing dogma of the association-imitation-reinforcement paradigm" (p. 245).

Chomsky distinguishes two aspects of language in his linguistic theories, namely, "competence" and "performance". By competence, he is referring to the underlying knowledge of the grammatical system. By performance, he is referring to the use of the knowledge to communicate. Chomsky bas been criticized rather severely by those who point out that his basic linguistic model is too restrictive in failing to include the social aspects of language (Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1979). Most (other than Halliday) agree with the competence and performance distinction but feel that competence should include not only grammatical sectors but psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and de facto sectors as well, to use Hymes's terms. Hymes (1972) proposes a broader notion of competence, that of communicative competence. He argues that in addition to linguistic competence the native speakers use another rule system while speaking, that is, the rules of language use. In Hymes' s view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to

> Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible; Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available; Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated; Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (Hymes, 1972, p. 281)

Such a theory of what knowing a language entails offers a much more comprehensive view than Chomsky's view of competence, which mainly deals with abstract grammatical knowledge.

Halliday rejects Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance altogether. He believes that such a distinction is misleading and irrelevant.

Halliday feels that the more we are able to relate the grammar system to meaning in social contexts and behavioral settings, the more insight we will have into the language system. Halliday writes,

> Linguistics... is concerned ... with the description of speech acts or texts, since only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language, and therefore all components of meaning, brought into focus (Halliday, 1970, p. 145).

Halliday's powerful theory of the functions of language complements Hymes' view of communicative competence. He describes seven basic functions that language performs for children learning their first language:

> 1. the instrumental function: using language to get meaning;
> 2. the regulatory function: using language to control the behavior of others;
> 3. the interactional function: using language to create interaction with others;
> 4. the personal function: using language to express personal feelings and meanings;
> 5. the heuristic function: using language to learn and to discover;
> 6. the imaginative function: using language to create a world of the imagination;
> 7. the representational function: using language to communicate information.
>
> (Halliday, 1975, pp. 11-17)

To proponents of communicative language teaching, learning a second language was simply acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions.

Widdowson also writes about his view of the communicative nature of language in his book *Teaching Language as Communication* (1978). He presents a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. He focuses on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes.

Later on the concept of communicative competence was further developed and enriched by Canale and Swain (1980). They identified four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to what Chomsky calls linguistic competence and what Hymes intends by what is "formally possible" (Hymes, 1972, p. 281). It is the competence that encompasses "knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology" (Canale and Swain, 1980, p. 29). Sociolinguistic competence refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants and the communicative purpose for their interaction. Discourse competence refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text. Strategic competence refers to the coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication. It is "the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence" (Canale and Swain, 1980, p. 30).

Canale and Swain's definition of communicative competence has undergone some other modifications over the years. These new views are perhaps best captured in Bachman's (1990) schematization of what he calls Language Competence, as shown in the following figure (Figure 1).

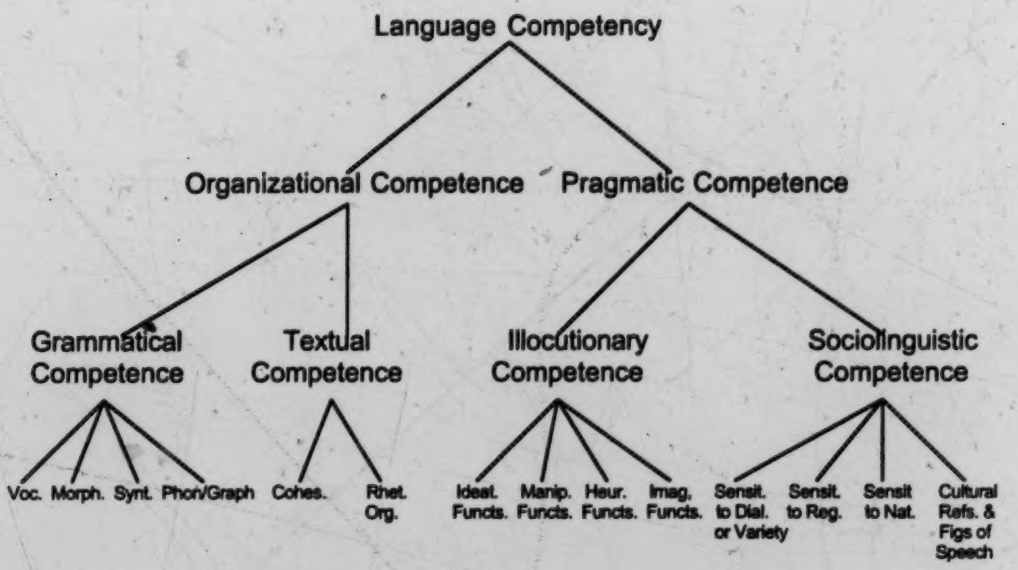

Figure 1. Components of language competence (Bachman, 1990, p. 87)

Bachman places grammatical and discourse (renamed 'textual') competence under one node which he calls organizational competence. By organizational competence, Bachman refers to the all those rules and systems that dictate what we can do with the forms of language, whether they be sentence-level rules (grammar) or rules that govern how we string sentences together (discourse). The sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Swain's definition of communicative competence was broken down into two separate pragmatic categories: functional aspects of language (illocutionary competence, or, pertaining to sending and receiving intended meanings) and sociolinguistic competence (which deals with such considerations as politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and culturally related aspects of language). Bachman also adds strategic competence as an entirely separate element of communicative language ability, as shown in Figure 2. Strategic competence almost serves an executive function of making the final decision, among many possible options,

on wording, phrasing, and other productive and receptive means for negotiating meaning.

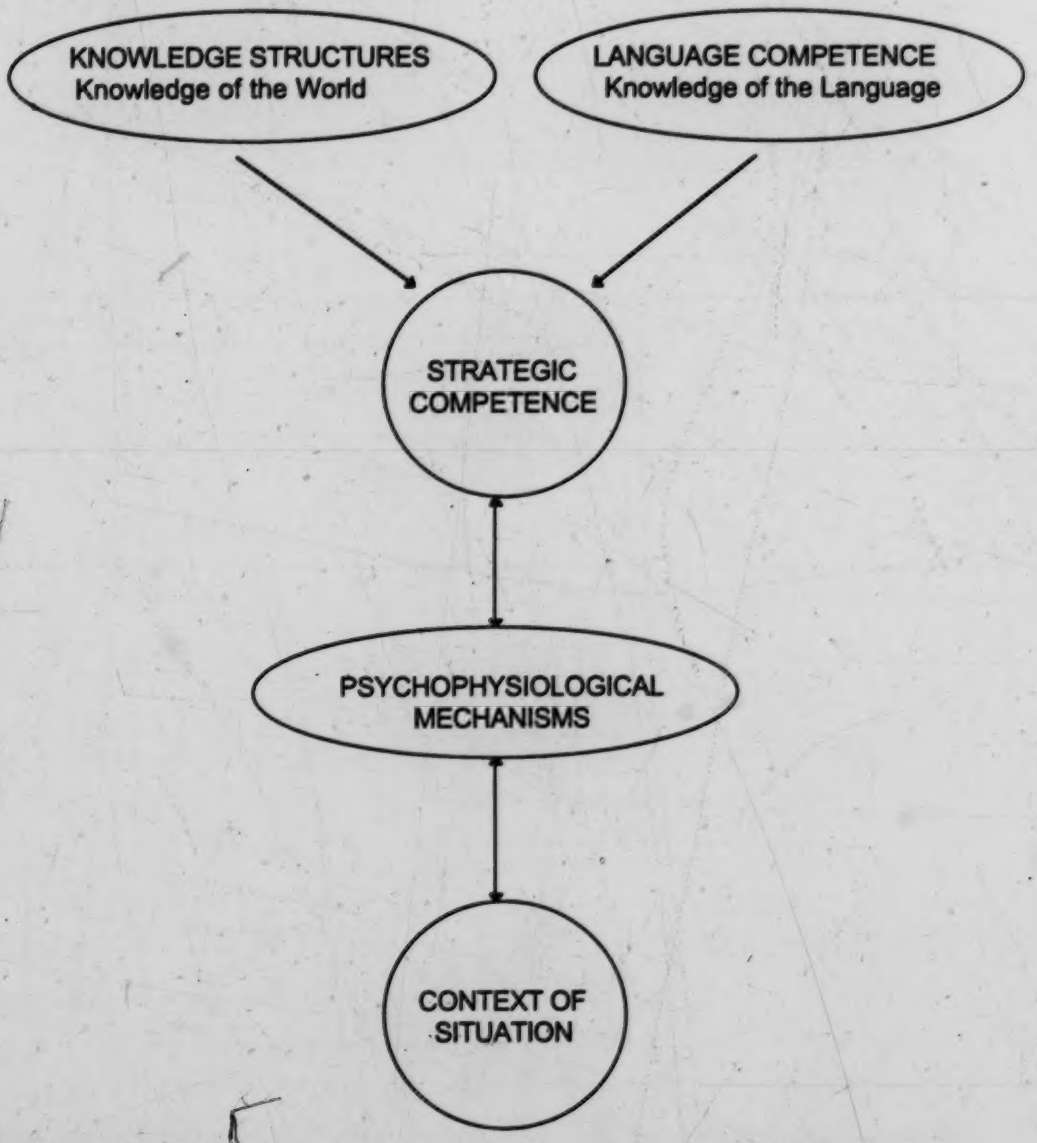

Figure 2. Components of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, p. 85)

Based upon the above understanding of communicative competence, adherents of communicative language teaching assert that linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and meanings, is indeed important but preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught. Students may know the rules of language usage, but will be unable to use the language. Students need knowledge of forms and meanings and functions. They must also use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situations in order to convey their intended meaning appropriately. Thus it is not sufficient to teach grammatical competence in second or foreign language classrooms. It was thought that communicative competence should be the goal of classroom teaching, hence the birth of communicative language teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching does not seem to have a clearly stated underlying learning theory, but elements of it can be inferred from communicative teaching practices. According to Richards (Richards and Rodgers, 1986), there are three major elements:

> One such element might be described as the communication principle: Activities that involve real communication promote learning. A second element is the task principle: Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning (Johnson, 1982). A third element is the meaningfulness principle: Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. Learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely the mechanical practice of language patterns) (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 76).

There are generally three principal characteristics of communicative language teaching, the most obvious of which is that almost everything that is done is

done with a communicative intent. Students use language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. Another characteristic is the use of authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used by native speakers. Finally, the activities in CLT are often carried out by students in small groups. Small numbers of students interacting are favored in order to maximize the time allotment to each student for learning to negotiate meaning.

In CLT, the teacher is a facilitator of the students' learning, the manager of classroom activities. In this role, one of the major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities he or she acts as an advisor, answering students' questions and monitoring their performance. At other times he or she might be a "co-communicator" -- engaging in the communicative activity along with the students (Littlewood 1981). Students interact a great deal with one another. They do this in various configurations: pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning--in trying to make themselves understood--even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete. They learn to communicate by communicating. Students are also seen as responsible managers of their own learning.

The major advantages of CLT as seen by Widdowson (1978), Canale and Swain (1980), Savignon (1983), Maley (1984), Richards and Rodgers (1986) and Stern (1992), include the following. First, CLT is more inclined to foster the four kinds of communicative competence in their learners than the more purely language-centered methods. Second, CLT provides its learners freedom to utilize the target language for their own purposes earlier than in the traditional teaching methods. In addition, CLT is prone to help students gain the

appurtenant competence to deal with the language in the real world because it emphasizes real language utilization while learning.

Criticisms of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching is not without its critics. There are generic disadvantages such as heavy demands upon teachers in communicative competence, deprivation of the security of a textbook, inclination to meet with resistance, greater expenses (Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain 1980; Savignon 1983; Maley 1984; Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Stern, 1992). Swan (1985) takes a much deeper and insightful look at communicative language teaching in his article, *A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach.*

> If one reads through the standard books and articles on the communicative teaching of English, one finds assertions about language use and language learning falling like leaves in autumn; facts, on the other hand, tend to be remarkably thin on the ground. Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach unfortunately has most of the typical vices of an intellectual revolution: it over-generalizes valid but limited insights until they become virtually meaningless; it makes exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents the currents of thought it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusions; it is choked with jargon (p. 2).

Swan first looks critically at some concepts which form part of the theoretical basis of the Communicative Approach. The first notion that he examines is the "double level meaning" associated with such terms as "rules of use" and "rules of communication" and the related concept of "appropriacy".

> There is of course nothing particularly novel about the two-level account of meaning given here. It has long been recognized that most language items are multi-purpose tokens which take in their precise value from the context they are used in. What is perhaps more novel is the suggestion that the value of any utterance in a given situation can be

> specified by rules ('rules of communication' or 'rules of use'), and that it is our business to teach these rules to our students (p. 4).

To Swan, language learners have their own mother tongues and they know just as much about how human beings communicate, despite possible differences in certain behaviors and thus language. Therefore, rules of use are mostly not relevant to the teaching of English.

> Although the Communicative Approach may have some new information and insight to contribute (for instance about the language of social interaction), there is nothing here to justify the announcement that we need to adopt a whole new approach to the teaching of meaning. The argument about 'usage' and 'use', whatever value it may have for philosophers, has little relevance to foreign language teaching (p. 5).

Swan disagrees that appropriacy of language is the real goal of language teaching.

> We must understand, however, that 'appropriacy' is one aspect among many--an important corner of linguistic description, but not by any means a feature of the language as a whole. 'Appropriacy' is not a new dimension of meaning, to be added everywhere to lexical and structural meaning. It is a category that applies to certain items only... (p. 7).

He argues that many problems classified as "appropriacy" in nature that arise in communication are actually the result of learners not having been taught enough words. While Swan has an obvious bias for teaching vocabulary, he is right in pointing out that "the discussion of appropriacy often obscures a perfectly valid point about the need for increased attention to the teaching of lexis (p. 7)".

The second idea that Swan criticizes about the Communicative Approach is the teaching of skills and strategies. In the Communicative Approach, it is often taken for granted that language learners cannot transfer communication skills from their mother tongues, and that these must be taught anew if the learners

are to solve the "problems of code and context correlation which lie at the heart of the communicative ability" (Widdowson, 1978, pp. 87-8). Swan argues that language learners already know, in general, how to predict, guess and negotiate meaning. They have been doing so all their lives and in their learning of their mother tongue. What they do not know is what words are used to do it in a foreign language. They need lexical items, not skills or strategies. He concludes

> ... the 'communicative' theory of meaning and use, in so far as it makes sense, is largely irrelevant to foreign language teaching. ... No doubt its [the Communicative Approach] heart is in the right place, and in some ways it has done us a lot of good. But theoretical confusions can lead to practical inefficiency, and this can do a lot of harm, with time and effort being wasted on unprofitable activities while important priorities are ignored (p. 11).

Swan also takes a critical look at the pedagogical aspects of the Communicative Approach. One of the ideas that he examines is the idea of semantic syllabus vs. formal syllabus. For many people, Swan points out, the central idea in "communicative" teaching is probably that of a "semantic syllabus". In a course based on a semantic syllabus, it is meanings rather than structures which are given priority, and which form the ongoing principle or "skeleton" of the textbook. But the fact is grammar has not been any easier to learn since the communicative revolution. Swan goes further to point out,

> Language is not *only* [emphasis by the author] a set of formal systems, but it *is* a set of systems, and it is perverse not to focus on questions of form when this is desirable. Some points of grammar are difficult to learn, and need to be studied in isolation before students can do interesting things with them. It is no use making meaning tidy if grammar then becomes so untidy that it cannot be learnt properly (p. 78).

Swan argues that a sensible approach to language teaching involves integrating semantic and formal syllabuses.

When discussing the requirement of the Communicative Approach of the authenticity of teaching materials, Swan points out,

> Nonetheless, the classroom is not the outside world, and learning language is not the same as using language. A certain amount of artificiality is inseparable for the process of isolating and focusing on language items for study... (p. 82).
>
> In fact, it is obviously desirable to use both scripted and authentic material at different points in a language course for different reasons (p. 84).

A sensible approach, Swan believes, involves combining authentic with specially-written teaching materials.

Swan is also critical of the Communicative Approach of the British version failing to recognize the role of the mother tongue in foreign language learning. He points out that the researchers tend to overemphasize the interference of the mother tongue and overlook the positive knowledge transfer from the mother tongue.

> Interlanguages notoriously contain errors which are caused by interference from the mother tongue; it is not always realized that a large proportion of the correct features in an interlanguage also contain a mother tongue element (p. 85).

He believes that "it is a matter of common experience that the mother tongue plays an important part in learning a foreign language" and that, when learning a foreign language, "students are always translating into and out of their own language" (p. 85). He argues that it is the knowledge that a learner brings to the task of learning a foreign language from the mother tongue that makes it possible to learn the new foreign language.

> If fact, if we did not keep making correspondences between foreign language items and mother tongue items, we would never learn foreign languages at all (p. 85).

To him, the reason why the important role of the mother tongue is absent from the theory and methodology of the Communicative Approach and little attention is paid to what learners already know is that the Communicative Approach seems to have a two-stage approach to needs analysis. He describes the two-stage approach as,

> 1. find out what the learner needs to know;
> 2. teach it.
>
> (p. 86)

He argues that a more valid model would have four stages:

> 1. find out what the learner needs to know;
> 2. find out what he or she knows already;
> 3. subtract the second from the first;
> 4. teach the remainder.
>
> (p. 86)

Swan is very right is pointing out that quite often we ignore what our students already know in conducting needs analysis of our students and teach things that they already know. He has made an important point in calling our attention to the useful role that the mother tongue may play in the process of learning a foreign language. But he fails to point out that the mother tongue plays a more important role in the early stages of learning a new foreign language and its role decreases as the learner progresses in the language he or she is learning.

The early 1990s witnessed a growing dissatisfaction with several aspects of CLT. "Much of the original criticism, and the consequent research that was aimed at offering improvements, was related to two main issues: (a) the

linguistic content base of CLT and (b) the pedagogical treatment of linguistic forms in CLT" (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, 1997, p. 142). Celce-Murcia et al. (1997) argue that in their zeal to give notional and socio-functional aspects of language proper consideration, many CLT proponents neglected linguistic competence and accepted the premise that linguistic form emerges on its own as a result of learners' engaging in communicative activities. For that matter, language professionals in recent years, applying a range of conceptual frameworks, have expressed the belief that making learners aware of structural regularities and formal properties of the target language will greatly increase the rate of language attainment (Long, 1983, 1988, 1991a; Long and Crookes, 1992). People have also been calling for certain reforms and suggesting changes in CLT. They propose that CLT needs to focus on the linguistic content as well, and formal instruction should be part of CLT (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 1992, 1993; Dornyei and Thurrell, 1991, 1992; Scarcella and Oxford, 1992; Schmidt, 1991; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Larsen-Freeman, 1990; Legutke and Thomas, 1991; Savignon, 1990; Widdowson, 1990). This proposal is in line with Swan's earlier argument for integration of formal and semantic syllabuses in language teaching.

Another criticism made by Whitley (1993) is the unnecessary debate and confusion about CLT in the research community. He believes that the debate and confusion have hampered the transmission of CLT from scholars to teachers, and suggests that further progress of CLT depends very much on overcoming disunity and translating consensus into standard course materials appropriate to local teaching conditions. While Whitley's point about unnecessary debate about CLT among researchers is arguable, he is right in suggesting that more effort should be made to connect research with practice.

Communicative Language Teaching in China

The Great Debate

Communicative language teaching started in the late 1970s and was popularized in the 1980s. While it was gaining popularity in teaching English as a Second Language, attempts were also made to introduce it into teaching English as a Foreign Language, through efforts of both foreign and local ESL/EFL researchers and practitioners. However, these efforts have met with tremendous difficulties. In accordance, studies have been done to explore these difficulties and ways are being worked out to overcome these problems.

While the studies which examine the introduction of CLT have taken place in many countries, China has received the most attention, due to the fact that it boasts the largest population of English learners in the world. Furthermore, China has been actively involved in innovations and reforms in literally every aspect of the country in the last twenty years. Since the early 1980s, debates have been going on about the necessity and feasibility of using CLT in EFL situations like China. There are generally three positions regarding such an issue. At one end, there are people who call for a complete adoption (Li, 1983; Maley, 1984), while others stress the importance of the traditional method in use in China today and the achievements that it has brought to English teaching in China (Sampson, 1984; Harvey, 1985; Wang, 1985). In the middle of the continuum stands the majority of debaters who are in favor of a more compromising position (Jia, 1989; Li, 1989; White, 1989; Fei & Duan 1993, Rao 1996). On the one hand, they see the inadequacies of the traditional method and consequently the problems arising in English learning and teaching in China. They also see communicative language teaching's potential for solving some of these problems. On the other hand, they are aware that to completely adopt CLT in a different EFL situation such as the one in China is extremely

challenging, if not entirely impossible. They call for a combination of the traditional and the communicative teaching methods.

Li Xiaoju is one of the most outstanding figures adamant about adoption of communicative language teaching in China. In her now classic article *In Defense of the Communicative Approach,* Li (1983) recounts her and her Canadian colleagues' success with developing and initiating communicative textbooks (The project in which she was involved was termed the Communicative English for Chinese Learners project, or CECL in short) at the Guanzhou Foreign Languages Institute (presently Guangdong University of Foreign Studies). Based on this experience, Li argues that CLT can and should be implemented in China. She argues that China must change itself to fit the Communicative Approach; for instance, the examination systems must be changed. She asserts that "the tide will turn when language testing has changed its focus from testing students' linguistic competence to assessing learners' communicative competence" (p. 13).

While her argument is convincing, it must be noted that her claims were made upon an exceptional case, where there are many of the privileges that most of Chinese educational institutions do not have. Guanzhou Foreign Language Institute was one of the few language institutes in China. They have very well-qualified teachers, foreign experts, and small English classes and language training facilities that most average tertiary institutions do not have. These institutions in turn generally have more resources and experts than secondary and elementary schools. Besides, Guanzhou Foreign Language Institute was one of the first three tertiary institutions which was designated by the State Ministry of Education as the site of experimenting with CLT in China. It had access to funds and government support which was not available for other educational institutions in China. In a word, many of the educational institutions

most probably will not be able to achieve what they did in Guangzhou Foreign Language Institute.

However, Li was not alone in advocating the adoption of CLT in China. Maley, a British language expert, who has some experience of teaching English and teacher education in China, also supports adoption of CLT in China. After analyzing the advantages and the disadvantages of CLT and taking a look at the Chinese teachers' and students' characteristics and their advantages and disadvantages for CLT, he concludes that introducing CLT into China is not only desirable but feasible and inevitable (1984).

However, Maley's conclusion seems a bit simplified. In his discussion of the feasibility of introducing CLT in China, he mainly bases his argument upon the teachers' and students' characteristics that he observed, leaving out some other important factors that might greatly affect the feasibility of using CLT in China, such as the educational system and the popular educational philosophy and educational resources available, just to name a few.

At the other end of the continuum stand people who see the importance of the traditional method to the success of English teaching in China over the years and are opposed to doing away with it. Harvey (1985) held talks with his Chinese students of science and technology who were about to go to study in English-speaking countries when he was teaching a three-month course in China. He was able to see that China's desire and interest to teach and understand the grammatical system appeared to be more constructive than is often said to be the case when the grammatical points taught and learned were not only remembered but also used by English learners. Harvey concludes that "China's learning method cannot simply be dismissed as 'primitive', 'old-fashioned', or 'misguided'. There are a number of obvious historical, pedagogical and psychological reasons for them" (p. 186).

Sampson (1984) suggests that the educational practices of memorization and modeling characteristics of the traditional methods widely used in China are not dysfunctional within the current educational theory in China and points out that the teaching practices EFL teachers observe in China are "not trivial or accidental, but inherent and important in the fabric of Chinese society" (p. 19).

Wang (1985), a senior Chinese linguist, is even more straightforward about his preference of the grammar-translation method.

> The grammar-translation method has been much criticized in language teaching. It has been regarded as old-fashioned. I am afraid that I'll have to disagree. To me, the grammar-translation method not only has had a long history in language education but is much needed in language teaching today. The problem is how to use it so that students can both learn how to do translation and meanwhile progress in English. The grammar-translation method, just like the audiolingual and communicative methods, is one of the important language teaching methods. It is not sensible either to deny or exaggerate its importance (p. 47).

In the middle of the continuum from complete adoption to a fondness for the traditional methods, many more people seem to favor a more compromising stance (Jia, 1989; Li, 1989; White, 1989; Fei & Duan 1993, Rao 1996).

In his 1989 position paper regarding the Communicative Approach in China, Guanyi Li (1989), known for EFL material development in China, begins with a careful and detailed review of the traditional and communicative methods, followed by a comprehensive comparison of these two methods. He believes that these two methods can be complementary to each other in English teaching in China. Both the traditional methods and the Communicative Approach have their advantages and disadvantages. "We as language teachers should make best use of their advantages. The Communicative Approach as the most recent development in language teaching methodology

must never be overlooked. We can take in its elements useful to us after necessary experiments with it. Meanwhile, the traditional methods are not that old-fashioned. Many of its elements that have survived many years of critical practice should be maintained and extended in use (p. 49)."

Fei and Duan (1993) also see the necessity and possibility of utilizing the advantages of the Communicative Approach in addition to the traditional methods to help improve language teaching in China:

> In appearance, the two methods [the traditional and communicative methods] are in absolute contradiction with each other and thus exclusive of each other. But in actuality, they are related and complementary to each other. When they are best combined, they will bring about the most desirable results of language teaching and hence can improve English teaching in China (p. 37).

White (1989) is also a strong advocate of combining the traditional method with the Communicative Approach. White taught English to a part-time adult class of varying background and English proficiency in China. He was able to try CLT with this group of students. To him, when motivating students to learn English through a more communicative approach, it is important to take into account habitual learning styles, aspects of language which are seen as significant and attitudes to less formal teaching.

> By acknowledging the expectations of students in terms of what they wanted to learn and how they were used to learning language, and by making careful compromises, it was possible to meet their needs, to expose them to new ways of learning English, and to encourage them to put their language to work in meaningful ways (p. 213).

Rao (1996) also emphasizes the necessity of considering the learning styles and the actual needs of the Chinese students in deciding which method or methods to use. He begins his discussion with a review of the pedagogical approaches used by native Chinese-speaking teachers of English in an

educational environment grounded in Confucian precepts of teaching, learning, and educational roles and responsibilities. Rao points out that many of the limitations on Chinese students' learning of English stem from a tradition of teacher-centered classroom and the use of rote-memory strategies. After noting the difficulties the Chinese English teachers face in implementing CLT, Rao offers guidelines for reconciling the Communicative Approach with traditional Chinese methods. These guidelines include: teachers should stay unbiased towards either of the methods; teachers should be sensitive to the learning styles and needs of Chinese students, for example, the use of mother tongue and the need for explicit explanation of grammar; teachers should provide students enough opportunities to practice and learn how to use the language.

In attempts to better understand the transplantation of CLT into Asian EFL situations like China, people have also started to look at the actual difficulties that have arisen in the course of using CLT in EFL countries. In Burnaby and Sun's (1989) study of Chinese university EFL teachers' attitudes towards the application of the Communicative Approach in China's EFL teaching, Chinese teachers cited constraints including the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment, the low status of teachers who teach communicative rather than analytical skills, and English teachers' deficiency in oral English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence in English. Anderson's (1993) study of Chinese EFL teachers reported obstacles such as lack of properly trained teachers, lack of appropriate texts and materials, students' being not accustomed to CLT, difficulties in evaluation in CLT apart from those cited in Burnaby and Sun's study.

A recent study by Xie and Derwing (1996) of community-based programs in China merits our attention. They note that "compared with formal government-

sponsored EFL programs, EFL programs for adults in community schools are distinct in areas such as funding, educational rationale, course offerings, admission, hiring systems, and language skill emphasis" (p. 394). The study seems to indicate that some of the problems in public institutions have been partially addressed by community-based English programs, which have appeared in China in recent years. For instance, such programs are more flexible in meeting students' English-related needs; they provide courses that are seldom available in formal institutions, such as examination preparation and English for Specific Purposes; they are open to basically anyone who can find a need to be in these programs; they emphasize listening and speaking while other skills are also included.

Outside mainland China there have also been studies on implementing CLT in EFL situations. Sano (1984) points out that Japanese students generally do not feel a pressing need to use English and thus a goal of communicative competence seems too distant for them. In Ellis's (1994) study of CLT in Vietnam, class sizes, grammar-based examinations and lack of exposure to authentic language were identified as the constraints for CLT. In a study which assessed the attitudes of Hong Kong educators towards CLT being used to teach English as a foreign language, Chau and Chung (1987) reported that because CLT requires too much preparation time teachers only use the method sparingly. Kirkpatrick's (1984) study of the role of CLT in secondary schools in Singapore referred to the fact that Singapore's grammar-based English language syllabus as a factor that made the second language teaching situation complex and the use of the Communicative Approach challenging. Gonzalez (1984) studied CLT in the Philippines rural areas and found that English instruction in rural areas is irrelevant to the population's needs as they seldom need it in their communication.

Outside Asia, Valdes and Jhones (1991) studied the introduction of CLT in tourism in Cuba and reported difficulties such as teachers' low proficiency in English, teachers' traditional attitudes toward language teaching, finding authentic materials in a non-English speaking environment, difficulties of redesigning an evaluation system, and adapting textbooks to meet the needs of communicative classes.

One strand of the related study seeks to understand and explain the sources of the difficulties and constraints that Chinese teachers have felt in using CLT in China. According to Sampson (1984), ESL specialists at the present time have no conceptual framework to guide them in deciding whether teaching methods developed in one country are appropriate for the educational systems of other countries. Because of lack of such a framework, problems have emerged as foreign and Chinese specialists wrestle with the difficulties involved in introducing Western teaching methods in China. They stem from not seeing development as multi-dimensional, from confusion about the relationship between scientific and educational theories and from the worldwide presence and acceptance of technocratic imperialism. As intellectual goods, Sampson believes, teaching methods are laden with cultural and political values, and hence "cannot be exported easily to other cultures where a different perspective of that eminently social process called education is in place" (p. 30).

Ting (1989) takes a deeper look at the differences between the Chinese and Western cultures, especially the ideological and philosophical understandings, upon which language teaching methods, traditional and modern, are founded. He points out that what stopped the Communicative Approach from taking root in Chinese English teaching is the fact that "as a way of ideological thinking of 2,000 years, Confucianism seems quite resilient" (p. 53) and that it is radically different from what CLT is founded upon in terms of learning and teaching.

Penner (1995) takes a more insightful look at the causes of the constraints for CLT to be implemented in China. She uses the framework of classroom culture to detail the differences between Chinese EFL and what CLT requires for it to work.

According to Penner, the first important difference is in Chinese and foreign educators understanding and expectation of teacher training. "The foreign teacher educators were focused on the technically oriented *how* (methods), whereas the Chinese were focused on the *what* (knowledge of the language).... It is no surprise, then, that because the expectations of the foreign teacher trainers differed from the felt needs and expectations for language improvement of the Chinese teachers, the result was resistance" (pp. 2-3).

Penner believes that the focus in the Chinese traditional approach on teacher, textbook, and grammar is in direct contrast to CLT's focus on learner, practice, and skill development. She believes that the major issue is that the Communicative Approach mainly established through research and practice in ESL contexts was promoted in an EFL context. Because the teachers and students in China did not have the same opportunities to reinforce their classroom learning as their ESL counterparts, CLT has had difficulty in entering the Chinese EFL practice.

Penner argues that a program plan and a curriculum is more than a list of teaching strategies and materials, but is also a set of assumptions and implied roles which have implications for the teacher. Thus it is necessary to examine the conflicts that arose when educators attempted to implement CLT into traditional Chinese language classroom. The conflicts as seen by Penner include: the traditional Chinese approach views language learning as memorization, repetition, habit formation while CLT sees learning as a skill development rather than a knowledge-receiving process. In the Chinese

traditional approach the teacher is essentially authoritative and transmits knowledge to the students whereas in the Communicative Approach the teacher takes a helper rather than knower role. The CLT approach assumes the student is willing to be an active participant, whereas the Chinese traditional approach only allows for seemingly passive receiver behavior. Chinese teachers aim to provide the grammatical and vocabulary knowledge so the students can successfully pass the many exams while the Communicative Approach aims to help students gain communicative competence. Chinese teachers are conformable evaluating grammatical competence but not confident in evaluating the sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence; while the Communicative Approach requires holistic evaluation of all the kinds of students' competence. Chinese teachers prefer prescribed textbooks while the Communicative Approach encourages using authentic English language materials (radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, real-life dialogues, etc.). Chinese teachers usually have 50 or more students in a class while the Communicative Approach has implications for much smaller classes. Chinese teachers have heavy workloads leaving them little time inside and outside the classroom while the Communicative Approach has implications for the teacher's use of time outside and inside the classroom. Chinese schools and universities are generally poorly equipped while the Communicative Approach has demands for resources such as the photocopier.

Penner concludes that the beliefs, pedagogy and structure that have developed in the Chinese English language classroom culture restricted pedagogical change advocated by foreign and Chinese change agents. Because of the discrepancies in educational theory, roles, expectations, methods, material use, and structural concerns, "A Chinese Way" should be developed to help Chinese English teaching. She believes that such "A Chinese Way" is viable but fails to give an account or indication of what it will be like.

To sum up, the transplantation of CLT from its birth place, viz. ESL contexts, to the 'foreign' places, viz. EFL situations, has proved to be difficult. There are three different opinions regarding this matter: complete adoption of CLT, preference for the traditional methods and the eclectic stance of combining the two methods. Among the debaters the majority are in favor of the eclectic position.

In the course of the debate, people have also tried to describe the actual difficulties that EFL teachers and countries might have in their attempts to use CLT in their EFL classrooms. Further to the description of difficulties and constraints, people have also tried to seek explanation for the difficulties from cultural, philosophical and epistemological perspectives. These studies have helped to clarify the issue to some extent.

However, the following characteristics of the CLT literature must be noted. First, the related literature has been predominantly opinion papers. Most people have spoken based upon their own teaching experience and their observations and thinking of the issue. Data-based empirical studies are rare, as are in-depth hermeneutic inquiries. Moreover, many of the writings are reflections from a fairly short period of teaching in China or other EFL situations. In order to make related studies more convincing and relevant to the actual practice, it is desirable to conduct more data-based studies grounded in an understanding of Chinese culture.

Second, many of the authors of the writings are non-Chinese language teachers who have mostly spent short periods of time teaching English in China. Their writings are inevitably affected by their limited understanding of the dynamics and complexities of English teaching in China. They often conclude with suggestions such as negotiating CLT in the traditional setting (e.g., White, 1985), incorporating a communicative component into traditional methods, and

resolving conflicts to bring about pedagogical change (e.g., Penner, 1995). Enlightening as they are, such proposals are too broad and too general to be manageable for classroom teachers.

The participants in the Great Debate have so far been overwhelmingly 'foreign experts" and most of the propositions have been made from the perspective of "researchers". With rare exceptions (e.g. Burnaby and Sun, 1989), the Chinese classroom practitioners' voices have been left out in the discussion. To gain a deeper insight into the issue of implementing CLT in China, it is worthwhile to find out the Chinese classroom English teachers' understanding of the issue.

Lastly, the literature on this topic has mostly dealt with English teaching at the tertiary level in China, literally overlooking English teaching in secondary and elementary schools. Thus their claims regarding this issue can probably only apply to English teaching in tertiary institutions in China. However, it is very important to include the secondary and elementary schools in the discussion.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an overview of English teaching in China was provided. Following that was a discussion of CLT as the most recent development in ESL/EFL teaching methodology. The third part of this chapter reviewed the related literature on the topic of implementing of CLT into English as a foreign language countries, China in particular.

The following chapter will describe the background of and the research design for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This chapter on design contains an account of the procedures used in the study, including selection of participants, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness of the study.

Case Study

Despite these efforts, communicative language teaching has so far not been popularized in China. In fact it is very seldom practiced in China. This is in sharp contrast with what the audiolingual method has experienced in China. The latter not only has been very popular in tertiary institutions but also has been finding its way into some secondary schools. Why has CLT had such a difficult time in getting into Chinese English classrooms? This study looks at the issue from the perspectives of the teachers, the front line troops. A case-study approach has been chosen for this purpose.

Case study has a long history of use in such disciplines as medicine, law, anthropology, political science and psychology. Case studies are intensive investigations of single cases which serve both to identify and describe basic phenomena, as well as provide the basis of subsequent theory development. Smith states that the assumptions underlying the use of a case study are similar to those of the qualitative research paradigm and observes that,

> the context has great impact on social behavior... the subjectivity of the research is not only inevitable but provides the only means of knowing, and control is instituted through multiple perspectives and methods (Smith, 1982, p. 205).

More recently, "education has recognized the advantage of using a case study approach for better understanding the process or dynamics of certain aspects of practice" (Merriam, 1985, p. 204). Stake defines the case study as the

investigation of a bounded system, emphasizing the unity and wholeness of that system, but confined to those aspects which are relevant to the research problem at the time (Stake, 1978).

According to Merriam (1988), there are four major attributes in case studies, namely, particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Particularistic

> means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent (Merriam, 1988, p.11).

This characteristic requires researchers to concentrate their attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems and also to take a holistic view of the situation.

By descriptive, Merriam means that the final product of a case study should be a rich thick description of the phenomenon being studied. The thick description is a complete literal description of the incident or entity under investigation (Merriam, 1988). Wilson states that cases studies use prose and other literary devices to describe and elicit images, and analyze situations (Wilson, 1979).

By heuristic, Merriam indicates that case studies can develop the reader's understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 1988). Stake also notes, "previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies" (Stake, 1981, p. 47).

Inductive, according to Merriam, means that case studies should rely heavily upon inductive reasoning in data-analysis and interpretation.

The important advantage of using case studies in educational research lies in the possibility of examining in great depth what we want to research. It suits the purpose of my present research.

Data Collection

This study intends to explore the difficulties (social, political, economic, cultural and so on) that EFL teachers in China have and might encounter in their attempts to introduce CLT and their understanding of the possibilities of overcoming these difficulties. The traditional devices used in a case study data collection of in-depth interviews, classroom observations, reflective journals have been used in this study. The data for this study rely heavily upon in-depth interviews with the research participants and on-site observations of the participants' teaching settings. The study spanned a period of eight weeks. While brief, the time allows for careful data collection by a researcher experienced in teaching in China and fluent in Chinese.

Interviews

Interviews with the six research participants were one of the primary modes of data collection for this study. According to Berg (1989), there are three types of interviews: the standardized (formal) interview, the unstandardized (informal) interview, and the semi-standardized (semi-structured) interview. The interviews used in this study were semi-structured. This type of interview is conducted in "a systematic and consistent order, but allows the interviewers sufficient freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions" (Berg, 1989, p. 17). Using a number of predetermined questions, which were sent to teachers ahead of time, enabled me to translate my

research objectives into specific language and enabled the teachers to prepare for the interviews, if they so chose.

While formulating interview questions, I adhered to the following guidelines suggested by Denzin:

> Questions should accurately convey meaning to the respondent: they should motivate him to become involved and to communicate his attitudes and opinions; they should be clear enough so that the interviewer can easily convey meaning to the respondent; they should be precise enough to exactly convey what is expected of the respondent...; any specific questions should have as a goal the discerning of a response pattern that clearly fits the broad content of the investigation...; if questions raise the possibility of the respondent's lying or fabricating (which is always a possibility), care should be taken to include questions that catch him up, or reveal to him and the interviewer that his previous answers have been incorrect (Denzin, 1970, p. 129).

I held four one- to two-hour interviews with each of the participants. The first interview mainly explored the participant's background and his/her life and teaching story. The second one focused on the participant's experience of teaching English, the methods used in his/her teaching career and his/her underlying philosophy of learning and teaching behind these decisions. The third one was on the participant's experience with CLT and the difficulties that he/she had or might have had with CLT either based on his/her personal experience or his/her understanding of CLT and the TEFL situation in China. The last one was an exploration of the participant's understanding as to the possibilities and degrees of these difficulties being overcome and the future directions that TEFL should be going in China, particularly in terms of teaching methods.

In planning this study, the language of communication during the proposed interviews was a matter of consideration for me. According to my experience, most English teachers in China are not fluent in English, though those

teaching at the tertiary level are generally better than those teaching in secondary and elementary schools. University English teachers may not find it difficult to conduct a class in English since the class is usually fairly structured and they can make preparations before class. But they generally find it difficult to express themselves in English as fully as in Chinese. Based upon such understanding, I proposed to the interviewees that either Chinese or English or a combination of the two languages would be used in our talks and they were asked to decide what language or languages to use. The result was that in most cases only Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English were used in the interviews.

All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed as soon as possible afterwards. The earlier interviews were also used to generate new interview questions and provide directions for subsequent ones. Transcripts of the interviews were given to the participants for verification.

On-site Observations

Another major source of data for this study was on-site observations of the research participants' teaching. Eisner notes, "in general, the richest vein of information is struck through direct observation of school and classroom life (1991, p. 182).

During the period of the study, I made regular visits to the participants' teaching schools. Besides observing the broad contexts that the participants were working in, classroom observations of the participants teaching were the major purpose of these visits. Such visits enabled me to understand the participants and the English teaching situations better and thus were very helpful in generating more probing questions for interviews to gain deeper understanding of the questions under study.

In classroom observations, both participant and passive observation were used in this study, depending upon the activities going on in the classrooms. Since the means that were used to collect data in classroom observations were to keep field notes and audiotape recordings of the classroom interactions, I would take a passive role in the observations when needed so that the recording of the classroom observations was not hampered. Participant observation was also employed only when I was sure that participation would not interfere with my observation and recording of the data. Field notes were also kept during the on-site observations and later expanded as soon as possible, mostly before the end of the day.

Hutchinson (1988) encourages researchers to use both observation and interview in their data gathering methodologies. "Observing, by itself, is never enough because it begs interpretation. Interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and to take into account the 'lived' experience of participants" (p. 125). It may not be possible to achieve a "full understanding" of any human experience, but I agree with Hutchinson that interviews and observations complement each other in the research process. Thus, minor short interviews were also held with the same group of teachers to complement observations during school visits. They took the form of unstandardized interviews. They were mainly done to seek clarifications and explanations about the things that I had seen and heard that day, particularly those related to teaching methodologies that arose in the lessons that he or she had just finished.

All these interviews were audiotaped and transcribed as soon as possible. In cases where the teachers were not available for interviews right after the class, I waited in their schools until they were available for comments. When this was not possible, I would leave them a detailed reply sheet with open-ended

questions about their lessons that had just been observed and ask them to answer the questions as soon as they had time. When they gave the written comments back to me, we would then go over them together for clarification and in-depth understanding of their ideas.

Researcher's Journal

To help gather ideas, throughout the research, I kept a researcher's journal myself. There were two important components of this journal. The first component was my journal of the research journey. What did I do that day? Why did I do it that way? How did it go? Why did it go as it did? Would I do it differently if I do it again and why or why not? What did I learn today as to how to do educational research? Through this process, I hope to learn from the research experience and improve my research skills.

The second component was recording of my thoughts and temporary interpretations of what I saw and heard and felt throughout the study. In my experience with qualitative study, I have found that quite often data collection, interpretation and analysis happen simultaneously. I believe it is useful to keep an account of the ideas coming up throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is not a simple description of the data collected. It is a process by which the researcher can bring interpretation to the data (Powney and Watts, 1987). Bogdan and Biklen note that qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They tell students and researchers,

> As a qualitative researcher planning to develop some kind of theory about what you have been studying, the direction you will travel comes after you have been collecting the data, after you have spent time with your subjects.

> You are not putting together a puzzle, whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture which together takes shape as you collect and examine the parts (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 32).

With the data in hand, I then started to identify patterns of the different categories of constraints that the participants reported. Themes were also worked out in regard to the possibilities, means and degrees to overcome these difficulties. Following this, comparisons were made of the responses of tertiary institution teachers teaching English and non-English majors, junior middle school and senior middle school teachers. Cross-comparisons were also made among the three categories of the participants, that is, the tertiary, secondary and elementary, in terms of their responses to the research questions with sensitivity to issues of trustworthiness (discussed later in this chapter).

Participants of the Study

This study was conducted in the context of a large city in the eastern part of the People's Republic of China. It is situated in one of the few economically and culturally well-developed provinces.

When I searched for potential participants for the study, I made it clear that I wanted to have people who had already had experience with CLT or at least were interested in CLT and had done some thinking about the issue of using CLT in China. To find them, I utilized the connections I had established in the local EFL community when I studied and later taught in the city. I was able to ask around in the community for people interested in the study, and had had some experience with CLT or had really thought about the issue. I also turned to people who knew the local EFL community well (like heads of English departments, school principals, local EFL teacher association staff) to recommend potential subjects.

The final participants in the study were six EFL teachers teaching at different levels. There were two from each of the three levels, that is, the tertiary, secondary and the elementary. One of the two from the tertiary level, Haigang (As in the stories, pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity), was selected among teachers teaching English-major students in Chinese higher institutions. The other, Fanke, was from teachers teaching non-English majors (for example, engineering students and science students) at colleges or universities.

There are two teachers from the secondary schcols, which in China are called middle schools (from grade seven to grade twelve). One, Chenli, is an English teacher of a junior middle school (grade 7 to grade 9) and the other, Yanbo, a teacher of a senior middle school (grade 10 to grade 12).

There are two teachers from the elementary level. In China, only fifth and sixth graders in most elementary schools learn English. Dingmei taught English to grade five and Maili taught English to grade six at the time of the present study.

The study involved two instructors from tertiary institutions. One was a comprehensive teachers' university and the other an engineering university. The study also involved two instructors from two secondary schools and two elementary schools.

Trustworthiness of the Study

One perennial issue that all researchers must deal with is the trustworthiness of the research findings. Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that there are four major concerns relating to trustworthiness. They are:

Truth value How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

Applicability How can one determine the degree to which the findings of a particular inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

Consistency How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

Neutrality How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, perspectives and so on, of the inquirer?

According to Guba (1981), researchers in the quantitative research paradigm use such terms as internal validity, external validity (generalizability), reliability and objectivity to address the above four areas of concerns, and they are inappropriate as the criteria for qualitative studies. Instead, alternative terms -- credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability -- and trustworthiness measures should be adopted.

Credibility. In establishing truth values, the qualitative inquirer is most concerned with testing the credibility of his findings and interpretations with the various sources (audiences or groups) from which data were drawn. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the following measures can be taken to increase the credibility of a qualitative inquiry: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, collection of referential adequacy,

and member checking during the study; establishing structural corroboration or coherence, establishing referential adequacy and member checking after the study has been completed.

In the present case study, these measures were taken whenever possible during and after the study so as to increase the credibility of the findings and interpretations. For instance, triangulation, (the process whereby various data sources, different investigators, different theories, and different methods are arranged against one another to cross-check the data and the interpretation), was applied in the study. I used a combination of interviews, observations, and reading the participants' writings when available to gather data for the study.

Prolonged engagement was also emphasized in the study. It "is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning 'the culture', testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 301). I spent eight weeks interviewing, observing, and interacting with the participants to explore their thoughts on CLT in China. This engagement also enabled me to gain a fairly deep insight into the situations that the participants were working in and build trust between the participants and me. Longer time might have intensified the findings.

Finally, persistent observations were employed in the present study. "The purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 302). Throughout the eight weeks of study, I made sure to observe each participant teaching at least once each week. Through persistent observations

like this, I was able to let go of those questions irrelevant and attend to those essential to the study.

Transferability. According to Guba (1980), the qualitative inquirer eschews generalizations on the grounds that virtually all social/behavioral phenomena are context-bound. It is impossible to develop "truth statements" that have general applicability. One must be content with statements descriptive or interpretative of a given context--ideographic or context-relevant statements. The transferability of the research findings relies heavily upon the extent of similarities between contexts (Guba, 1981). In order that the reader will be able to compare his/her context with the one under study, collecting thick descriptive data, doing theoretical/purposive sampling during the study and developing thick descriptions after completing the study are important measures that can be used.

In the present study, I made efforts to generate rich and detailed descriptive data of the participants and their working contexts. In the report of the study, I included a reasonably thick description of the context of this study to give the reader sufficient knowledge of the context of the study so that he/she can determine the degree of fit with his/her contexts and to provide evidence for the theoretical comments generated from the data.

Dependability. Qualitative researchers are concerned with stability of data, but must make allowances for apparent instabilities arising either because different realities are being tapped or because of instrumental shifts stemming from developing insights on the part of the investigator-as-instrument. Guba (1980) advocates using measures such as establishing an "audit trail", using overlap methods and making stepwise replication during the study and arranging for a "dependability" audit after completing the study.

In this study, establishing an "audit trail" in the study has been designed into the research. The audit trail will make it possible for an external auditor to examine the processes whereby data were collected and analyzed, and interpretations were made (Guba, 1980). For this purpose, the researcher took and kept the observation and interview notes and other documents coming out of the study. A running account of the research process in the form of the investigator's daily journal was also kept. After collection of the data, I arranged for a "dependability" audit by a recent Ph.D graduate able to read English and Chinese.

Confirmability. Qualitative researchers shift away from the concept of investigator objectivity toward the concept of data and interpretational confirmability. Triangulation and practicing reflexivity are the two steps that can be taken during the study to achieve this goal of confirmability (Guba, 1980). In the present study, I established triangulation through collecting data from different sources and using a variety of methods and also tried to "reveal to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which cause him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way" (Ruby, 1980, p. 157). From my continuing journal in which introspections were recorded on a daily basis (Spradley, 1979), I documented shifts and changes in my research orientation (Reinharz, 1979).

After the completion of the study, I again followed Guba's suggestion to complete a confirmability audit. The same external audit person who performed the dependability audit certified that data exist in support of every interpretation and that the interpretations have been made in the ways consistent with the available data. Because my thesis advisor had access to data and the committee considered the report of the study carefully, another means of confirmability was available.

Chapter Summary

A case study approach was selected to explore teachers' understanding of implementing CLT in China. In it, six teachers were chosen to participate in the study, with equal number of participants from each of the three categories, the elementary, secondary, and tertiary.

Data collection modes included in-depth semi-structured major interviews, on-site observations of participants' teaching, and collection of participants' writings related to teaching when available, and a researcher journal.

All the interview recordings were transcribed and selected parts were translated into English. All the data gathered were then analyzed for themes for reporting and discussion in the written report of the study.

Chapter Four will introduce the participants and present their situations. From the specifics, the general themes and issues that emerged in data analysis will be presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section is an introduction to each of the six participants of the study. In the second six themes emerging from this study are presented. The third section is a revisit of the four major research questions. A summary then concludes the chapter.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are six Chinese English teachers, with two from each of the elementary, secondary, and tertiary level. Meili and Dingmei both teach grade 5 and 6 English in elementary schools. Chenli and Yanbo are teachers of English in secondary schools. Chenli teaches junior middle school students and Yanbo teaches English to senior middle school students. Haigang and Fanke teach English at the university level. Haigang teaches English to students majoring in English while Fanke teaches English to engineering students. All participants teach in different institutions.

Meili

Meili is an outspoken woman in her early 40s (to better protect the anonymity of the informants, only approximate ages are provided for them in the report.). She is married and her husband is a translator who has just been demobilized from the army. They have a son, who is attending grade 8 in middle school. Meili teaches English in an elementary school. She has taught both grade 5 and 6 and was teaching grade 6 when the research was done.

Meili has had rich experience: first a peasant, then a factory worker and presently an elementary school English teacher. In 1974 when she graduated from middle school, she was forced to go to labor in the countryside because

her father was labeled "rightist" during the Cultural Revolution. While laboring in the fields, she was able to, through old connections, join in the county's Propaganda Team, a group of selected people with some performing talents whose duties were to disseminate the Chinese Communist Party's policies though singing, dancing or other forms of traditional Chinese art. So she was often called upon to give performances. In this way, she was able to achieve her purpose of joining the team -- to escape the hard work in the fields. Also in this period, a nearby elementary school happened to need a teacher and Meili was then hired to teach the regular subjects in the school. So, though she spent at least two years in the countryside, she actually did not do much physical work.

Meili then became a worker. In 1976 when the Cultural Revolution was over, Meili, like millions of young people who were sent to "learn from the peasants" in the rural areas, was eager to come back to the city. She tried different venues. Finally, unable to get a teaching position, she started to work in a factory on the outskirts of a major city. She worked as a chemical analyst in the factory. She would normally finish her job duties in half of her work time and spend the rest of her time studying. During this time, Meili started to work on a diploma in English and chemistry. She wanted to fulfill her wishes. From the time she entered the elementary school, she had hoped to study in the university. Unfortunately, it was in the heyday of the Cultural Revolution when she graduated from middle school, and her father was labeled 'rightist', she had no chance to enter the university. So she was eager to study what she had missed. Also, she was still experiencing political suppression because of her father, so she chose to seclude herself from the outside world. She found reading more enjoyable than socializing with people in the factory. What she read most at this time was English, the reason being that she was in love with a man who specialized in English. The man later became her husband.

After a year of working in the factory, an elementary school near the factory needed an English teacher. Since she had been a teacher and had been working on her diploma in English, Meili was hired to teach English in the school. During the period of working in the factory and later teaching in the elementary school, she was able to obtain two diplomas: one in English and the other in chemistry.

In 1988, it was arranged that Meili taught a demonstration class in her previous school. Many teachers and researchers came to observe her teaching. Her lesson was a success and that brought her a streak of good luck. Right after the class, one of the teaching consultants from the city proposed to her that he could arrange for her to transfer to teach in an elementary school in his jurisdiction in the city. She was thrilled at this. In early 1994, Meili transferred to her present school and has been teaching there till today.

Meili has been a teacher for almost 20 years and has found teaching interesting.

Dingmei

Dingmei is a woman in her late 20s. She is married with a son of four years old. Her husband works in an oil company. Dingmei teaches English in an elementary school in the city.

Dingmei finished junior middle school (grade 10) in 1984 and went into Xiao Zhuang Teachers' School, well-known in China, which was founded by a famous Chinese educationist. There she specialized in English education for three years. When she graduated in 1987, she was assigned to teach at her present elementary school. She has taught there for 11 years.

There are now two English teachers in her school, but when she started in 1987, Dingmei was the only English teacher. She taught English to all the four classes in grade 5 and grade 6. In 1995 when English was specified as one of the subjects in the Entrance Examinations for Junior Middle School, another teacher was hired in order to ensure that students would be well prepared for the Examination. Now Dingmei and the other teacher are sharing the four classes of the two grades. Besides English, they both need to teach some other subjects such as geography, history, or natural science in order to be full-time teachers. Dingmei has taught both grade 5 and grade 6 and she was teaching grade 5 when this study was done.

Dingmei was a graduate of a teachers' school when she first started teaching in her present school. Soon after she started teaching, she began to work on a diploma in English through the Self-Taught Examination System and finished the program four years ago in 1992. She then started to work on a B.A. degree in English language and literature through the same system. She has been doing well in her B.A. program. After one more exam, she will be working on her thesis for her B.A. degree.

Dingmei considers herself rich in language teaching experience but weak in language teaching theories. She wishes to learn more about language, language learning and teaching. So her next goal is to sit the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies the following year. If successful, she would like to work on a M.A. in English Teaching Methodology.

Chenli

Chenli is a woman in her mid-fifties. She is married with two children, a son and a daughter, who are both working now. Her husband teaches math in another middle school in the same city.

Chenli attended a teachers' college in another city of the province. It was a three-year college when she was studying there and now has developed into a comprehensive major university in the province. In 1964 when she finished her study at the college, Chenli was assigned to teach English at her present middle school. She was one of the first teachers of this school when it was founded in 1963. Four years later, the Cultural Revolution began and her school was closed down for quite a few years. Chenli was then a junior teacher and also she was sick for quite a few years, so she was able to save herself from the possible persecutions that hundreds and thousands of Chinese intellectuals including teachers suffered during the Cultural Revolution. When the school resumed in the late Cultural Revolution years, she also returned to her teaching position.

Chenli has been a teacher of English for 34 years. For all these years, she has been teaching English to junior middle school students in the same school. She has taught all the three grades (grade 7, 8 and 9) in junior middle school and was teaching grade 9 when this study was done.

In 1994, Chenli was sent by her school to study in Britain for a year. She found that helped her a lot in improving her oral English and getting to know the English culture.

Besides teaching, Chenli also holds the position of director of the English Section of the Junior Branch in her middle school. She is happy with her teaching but a bit regretful that she has not written much about English teaching. She has decided that in the following years she would like to spend some time on writing up her experience of 30 years of teaching English in China. She has actually started a research project called "Balancing grammar and communicative competence in English teaching in middle school".

Yanbo

Yanbo is a man in his early fifties. He is married with a daughter, who is working in a company in the city. His wife is a physics teacher in another middle school in the same city. Yanbo is very outspoken and easy to talk to. He has taught for over 30 years.

Yanbo started his university education in the department of mathematics in a teachers' college in 1959. Two years later, the university decided to select a couple of good students from each of the non-English departments in the university to form one class – the Intensive English Class. The selected students were then all transferred to study in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature in the same university. The purpose for such a class was to train some teachers who would be good at both English and their own specialties so that they could go back to their respective departments to teach English for Specific Purpose, such as, English for mathematics, English for physics, and English for mechanical engineering. Yanbo was one of the selected students and was then transferred to study in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature.

Yanbo graduated from the university in 1963. He did not get to teach in the university but instead was assigned to work as an interpreter for several years and went abroad with Chinese medical groups. Two years later, right before the Cultural Revolution, he came back from the overseas expeditions and was then assigned to teach in a foreign languages middle school in the city where he is teaching now. In 1984, Yanbo was transferred to teach in a different middle school. Ten years later he was transferred to his present middle school and has been teaching here till today. Yanbo has taught English to senior high school students throughout the years. He has taught all the three grades

(grade 10, 11 and 12) and was teaching grade 11 students at the time this study was done.

In addition to teaching, Yanbo has also been an administrator for close to 20 years. In all the three different schools where he has worked, he served as principal or head of the branch of the Chinese Communist Party. That was actually why he was transferred to different schools — "to meet different needs of the party and government".

Yanbo likes what he is doing now and enjoys being a teacher. He is also interested in doing some research related to English teaching in secondary schools. He, together with his colleagues, is now working on a project entitled "How to teach communicative English in secondary schools".

Haigang

Haigang is a man in his early 30s. He is married and his wife is an English teacher too. They both teach in the same university. They have a son who is now in grade 4.

Haigang was born in a miner's family in one of the underdeveloped provinces in China. His father was a coal miner and his mother was unemployed. Haigang had three elder and two younger sisters. When he was very young, he had to help his mother break stones to make money, gather coal or cut trees for cooking. Haigang's childhood was characterized by poverty and hard work. Nevertheless he had a happy childhood because he received a lot of attention as the only boy among six children in the family.

Haigang began to learn English in grade 7. Somehow he took delight in learning the language and did well in it. When he was in grade 9, he started to read English textbooks for university students.

Haigang's parents did not push him much to study at the university. But because no one in his family had ever left the mine, he wanted to leave it to see the larger world outside. Also, the temptation of changing the economic status of his family was another important driving force for him. He knew if he went to the university, he would be able to get a job with a salary after graduation. That was much better than working in the mine.

After a fierce competition, Haigang was admitted into the teachers' university in his province in September 1983. Haigang did not mind being a middle school English teacher because he really liked to be a teacher. Besides, he was more than satisfied to be able to escape the hard work at the mine.

When he was studying at the university, he fell in love with a girl classmate who later became his wife. But they were from different parts of the province and they would be assigned to teach in their hometowns upon graduation. In order to save their love and future marriage, they both sat the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies and were both admitted into the postgraduate program in a teachers' university in a coastal province in the summer of 1987 after they got their B.A.s in English language and literature following four years of study.

Haigang continued to work on English language and literature for his postgraduate study. When he graduated after two years of study, he was assigned to teach English in a university. While teaching, he completed his M.A. thesis and was conferred M.A. in English Language and Literature (specializing in Chinese-English translation) in 1992.

Haigang has taught in the university for 8 years now. He has been teaching university students majoring in English language and literature. The courses he has taught include English Reading, English Conversation, English Listening and Speaking, and English Grammar.

In early 1993, Haigang was appointed the director of the English Section and in October 1995 was appointed the associate chair of the Department of Fundamental Studies in his university.

In addition of teaching and administration, Haigang has also been actively involved in research. His research has focused on: English reading and writing, and English vs. Chinese translation theory and practice.

Haigang's next major effort will be to seek an opportunity to further his study in an English-speaking country. He expects that such an experience will help him improve his spoken English and establish some contacts with overseas universities.

Fanke

Fanke is in his early 40s. He is married and his wife teaches English in a middle school in the city where he teaches. They have a daughter who just started junior middle school.

Fanke finished his middle school in the late Cultural Revolution years and then became a peasant working in the fields. When the Revolution was over in 1976 and the National Entrance Examination System was restored in 1977, he decided to sit the Examinations. In 1978, he was admitted into one of the teachers' colleges in the province. When he finished the second year at the college, he, together with two classmates, was selected and sent to study

another two years at another supposedly better teachers' college. When he got his Bachelor of Arts in English language and literature in 1981, he was assigned to teach in a middle school in the rural area in his home county.

After teaching there for 7 years, Fanke and his wife decided to come to live in the city. For this purpose, Fanke decided to do postgraduate study at the university and then get a position in a university or college after graduation. In 1988, Fanke sat the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies and was admitted to the same college (which had become a university by then) where he finished his B.A. He studied in the non-degree postgraduate program for two years, specializing in English language and literature. When he finished this program in 1990, he was employed by the university to teach in one of its affiliated middle schools.

Three years later, Fanke was able to secure a teaching position in the university, where he is now teaching such courses as English Reading, English Listening and Speaking and English Grammar to engineering students. He has so far taught there for 4 years in addition to 10 years of teaching in middle schools. After he got the position in the university, he was able to, with the help of the university, bring his family to the city.

Fanke's research interests were college English teaching methodology and EFL curriculum and material development. He is considering doing a Ph.D. in applied linguistics at one of the prestigious universities in China.

Emergent Themes

In this part, the themes that have emerged from the study will be discussed. In presentation of the findings, an abundance of supporting data are cited so that the teachers' voices can be heard. The six themes that are discussed include:

pride in the achievements in English teaching in China, concerns over the problems in English teaching in China, desire for changes in English teaching in China, understanding of CLT and its potential for English teaching in China, difficulties in using CLT in China, and uncertainty in overcoming the difficulties.

Pride in the Achievements in English Teaching in China

All the respondents were enthusiastic about English teaching. They took pride in the achievements that China had made in English teaching over the years and were proud of making their contributions. One of the major achievements identified was the large number of English-speaking personnel that China had produced over the years.

> China has trained a huge number of English-speaking personnel. These people have served China well in all departments of the country. It is because of them that China has achieved successes in world politics, economy and international affairs (Yanbo, 04-01-97).

For Meili, Chenli, and Fanke, the achievements can be seen in the number of graduates from their schools and institutions, who have been prepared in English to move onto the next stage of study or work with English at their jobs.

> The achievement I see is that kids who learned English in our elementary school have found it easier to learn English in middle schools (Meili, 29-12-96).

> Secondary school English teaching has made really great accomplishments over the years. The most important manifestation is the huge number of students who have graduated from middle schools and entered universities. Without the preparation of English in secondary schools, they won't be able to get into the university (Chenli, 31-12-96).

> I would say that Chinese English teaching has been successful though it still has many problems. Just look at how many students have graduated from our university. Most of them are using English in one way or the other. Also, from the number of our graduates who are now either studying or working in English-speaking countries and the success they

> have with their lives and studies, we can also see the achievements of Chinese English teaching (Fanke, 02-01-97).

Another achievement identified is that, over the years, China has formed its own system of English teaching, under which it accommodates the world's largest population of English learners despite the present unfavorable conditions.

> China has already formed its own system of language teaching. China is teaching the largest number of English learners in the world. For so many years, we have relied on our China-trained English-speaking personnel to deal with English-speaking countries and organizations. This shows China's way of training English-speaking personnel is viable to some extent (Haigang,13-01-97).

To the respondents, some of the policies that China has made regarding teaching of English also indicate that China is advancing in English teaching. For instance, China has decided to raise the requirements for employing university English teaching staff.

> It has been made clear that from now on we are generally not allowed to hire any more B. A. holders in this department. People who seek employment in our department must have a M. A. (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Middle schools have also started to look for Master's program graduates. For elementary schools, their employees have to be at least diploma holders in education. Recently, China has also made the policy that all elementary and secondary school teachers must learn to use computers and pass relevant examinations in order to continue their employment.

All these were considered by the respondents as signs of progress in English teaching in China. However, while celebrating the achievements that China has made over the years, the teachers also expressed concerns over the problems inherent in English teaching in China.

Concerns over the Problems in English Teaching in China

The major problems that the respondents reported in English teaching in China included: students' poor communicative abilities; English teaching led by grammar-based examinations; teachers' and students' insufficient knowledge of English culture; difficulties in finding appropriate textbooks and teachers' poor living conditions.

Students' Poor Communicative Abilities

In the interviews, all respondents expressed concerns about the fact that most Chinese students have poor communicative abilities even after learning English for several years. In most schools and universities, English is still taught with the traditional methods or a combination of them. When asked which method(s) she was using, Dingmei responded,

> I use different methods, such as the direct method, situational language teaching, the audiolingual method and CLT. I combine them together in my teaching. I select different methods according to what and who I am teaching. I believe many teachers are like me (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

When teachers use these methods, English teaching and learning is still very much focused on memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary. The ability to use the language to communicate with others is not stressed in most instances. Students hardly get opportunities to practice or use what they have learned in class, the result being that many of the students, after studying English for quite some years, are not able to communicate effectively and efficiently with English speakers. They find it hard to follow an English speaker and difficult to express themselves in English. In China, these students are popularly called "deaf (*long*)" and "mute (*ya*)" English learners, meaning that

they can neither understand nor speak with English speakers, though they can read and write some English.

> They generally have difficulties in expressing themselves and in following English speakers even when they speak slowly (Fanke, 21-01-97).

> ... My students are finishing middle school and many of them really have difficulty communicating with English speakers. They are actually what I call 'deaf (*long*)' and 'mute (*ya*)' English learners (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Dingmei provided her own example with oral English to illustrate this problem.

> Once when I was watching a news broadcast in English on TV, my husband came over and sat down beside me. After watching for a few minutes, my husband suddenly asked me what the TV had been saying. After some thinking, I told him about the main idea of the episode. He then laughed, 'They have been talking for five minutes. You did it in one sentence!' I was really embarrassed. Honestly, I could not understand much of what they were saying on TV, so I could only tell him a very rough, incomplete idea as to what was said (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Actually, the respondents also expressed concerns over the students' reading and writing abilities. Usually, Chinese students admit that they are poor at English speaking and listening but they usually claim that they are good at English reading and writing. However, the teachers did not seem to agree. To them, the students' reading and writing abilities might be better compared with their listening and speaking abilities but in fact many of them are not competent in reading and writing English either. What they are really good at is the English grammar.

> Our students are better in reading and writing compared with their speaking and listening abilities in English. But actually, the students' reading and writing abilities are far from being good if not compared with their listening and speaking. I have good examples here. Some of our graduates were assigned to work in business companies and their positions there were mostly secretaries to managers. Often they were

> asked to read messages, letters, documents, contracts in English. They should be able to get the main idea of these documents within a reasonably short time and then report to their managers. But they often found this difficult. The first problem was their slow reading speed in English. Second, they did not have a very good 'feel of the language' and their English abilities were not good enough. They told me that sometimes even after they looked up the meanings of the words in the documents, they could not put together the meaning of the whole document.
>
> Their writing ability is not satisfactory either. What they like to do is to use whatever words they hear or read without fully understanding their meaning and usage. They like to use new and difficult words to show they know many words. They even leave aside what they really want to say in order to use a new word or phrase in the writing. Again for some of our graduates working in foreign companies and Sino-foreign joint ventures, they were assigned to compose documents or letters in English, and they often had difficulty completing their assignments (Haigang, 10-02-97).

The reason for this, according to the teachers, is that many Chinese English teachers have been strongly influenced by the traditional methods and ideas of language learning. Under these influences, the reading texts in the textbooks are not used to develop students' reading ability, but merely to help explain the grammar rules in that lesson and present new vocabulary to the students. So, the text is often broken into pieces by the teacher to explain certain language points. When the language points are dealt with, the text is finished. The teacher does not even summarize the central idea of the text him/herself or ask the students to do it. The meaning of the text is often completely ignored.

> I personally think that the way that reading is taught in China is really problematic. In Intensive Reading classes, students are not taught how to read for meaning but what the grammar rules are. As director of the English Section, I had many opportunities to observe the teachers in this unit teaching. Many of them only explain the grammatical points in the text and then translate the text into Chinese sentence by sentence. That's all they do with the text. What is even worse is that this also happens in Extensive Reading classes. Extensive Reading is supposed to give students a lot to read and train their ability to read fast for

meaning. But teachers deal with the reading materials the same way they do in Intensive Reading classes (Haigang, 10-02-97).

English Teaching Led by Grammar-Based Examinations

All respondents were also very much concerned about the examination system as the sole screening mechanism for deciding the fate of students' future education and careers. The exams have put a lot of stress on schools, teachers, students and parents. Among all examinations, the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning is the most important and receives the most attention each year. Nowadays, the Entrance Examinations for Senior and Junior Middle Schools are also gaining attention. Because of the stress, students' suicides after failure to enter the university are reported or heard of almost every year. There are also reports of children leaving home as a result of disputes with parents regarding their studies. It is believed that some students suffer from schizophrenia due to huge pressure. When discussing this issue, Yanbo expressed his boredom with the examinations.

> The examination has had a long history in China. In the old times, especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the imperial exams were held every year to select officials for the government. Nowadays, exams are used more widely. They are everywhere. To get education, you need to sit all kinds of entrance exams. To get promotion, you have to sit the promotion examinations. To join the Chinese Communist Party, you need to sit the Examination of CCP Rules and Regulations....To enter the junior middle school, you have to sit the Entrance Examinations for Junior Middle School. To enter the senior middle school, you have to sit the Entrance Examinations for Senior Middle School. To enter the university, you have to sit the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning. To go abroad, you have to sit the Going Abroad English Examination (Yanbo, 13-01-97).

The stress that examinations put on schools, teachers, students and parents is huge. Schools feel the stress because their reputation and also their ability to recruit new students are decided by their students' achievements in the

examinations. Teachers care much about examinations because their performance is judged based upon students' achievements in these examinations. Students rely on their achievements in the examinations to decide whether they will be able to continue their education and which schools or universities they will be able to attend. Parents are concerned about the examinations because they can decide their children's futures and tell whether their offspring can glorify their ancestors. One teacher forcefully shows this point.

> In China, everything is for the exam and everything is decided by the exam. No matter how well a teacher teaches, no matter how beautiful the teacher's pronunciation is, if her students do not get good scores in exams, she will have a hard time in the school (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Fanke cited his daughter's example to show how stressful exams are for different parties.

> Children are scared of exams, so are parents. I remember, after my daughter sat the Entrance Examinations for Junior Middle School, she was too scared to ask her teachers about her score. So was I. I wanted very much to know it but I dare not ask either. I waited until the last minute when I went with my daughter to her school. When we got there, my daughter was so scared that she did not dare to go into the classroom to see her teacher. She waited outside while I went in to ask about her score. I was trembling in my heart when I went in. Even after I learned about her score, I was not relieved because I was not sure then whether she could go to the middle school she wanted or we wanted her to attend. I was not relieved until I heard the following confirmation from her teacher: 'Even if the sky is turned over, there is no problem for her to be admitted into that middle school'. When I came out, my daughter was crying.
>
> My daughter is now in Linjing Middle School, a key school in the city. She is one of the top five in her class. As soon as they finish an exam, they never wait for their teachers to tell who is the first, second or third. They themselves know very clearly who is the best.
>
> To be in the top five, my daughter really studies hard. She often stays up until 12 o'clock to do her homework and preview new lessons for the

next day. The only time she can have some fun is a few hours on Sunday afternoons.

When my mum and dad came to see us, they were surprised to see how I had my daughter studying. They complained, 'How can you have her work like that. She is only a child.' But, you know, she is not the only one who is studying so hard. She is just one of the millions. As parents, we know that this is something that she has to go through in order to get to the senior middle school that she hopes to enter. One point less than the score set for the school can mean more than 10 thousand *yuan* [approximately $1220 Cdn, the amount that a Chinese secondary school teacher makes in a year] if you want to enter the school. We are teachers. You know we really can't afford that big sum of money. So the only thing that we can do is to have her study as hard as possible. Another thing that you may want to know is that, if your child's score does not reach the score set for a certain school, even if you have the money, you may not find the way to pay the money. There will still be fierce competition there too. Money can not guarantee you entering a middle school. I am not the head of the Education Bureau or the head of the Provincial Bureau of Foreign Affairs. Why shouldn't I worry?

Once we went to visit my sister in my hometown. My sister was really upset about me when she learned that my daughter slipped to be the fifth top student in her class in the examinations she had just completed. To my sister, my daughter had to be the top student. If not, it's my fault. I personally also feel pressured. First, my brothers and sisters and myself are all university graduates. My nieces and nephews are studying at universities now. I know I must send my daughter to the university.

Therefore, you see, from elementary school onward, Chinese students have to be tormented under such a system for nearly 20 years (Fanke, 13-01-97).

The respondents felt that they, together with their students, students' parents and their schools, are led by the examinations in all learning and teaching activities. Because the examinations are basically grammar-based, grammar has to be the focus of their classrooms. This leaves little time for developing students' communicative abilities.

Exams are like an orchestra conductor's stick. Where it points, teachers, students and parents just rush towards it. That's why everybody is doing a lot of grammar in English classes (Meili, 08-01-97).

Teachers' and Students' Insufficient Knowledge of the English Culture

The respondents also showed concerns over the insufficient knowledge of English culture taught to students. Because 'English' (*yingyu*) in Chinese is generally taken to mean the language of the English-speaking countries rather than that of the Great Britain only, English culture in this context refers to the culture of the English-speaking countries. For many Chinese students and teachers, the respondents informed, to learn English is to learn English grammar rules, and culture is not necessarily a part of English learning. So, in most cases, English culture is not emphasized in the classroom teaching. This is particularly the case in secondary and elementary schools.

> There is not much cultural knowledge in our textbooks. Neither is there much in the teacher's manual. We depend very much on the teacher's manual to teach the lessons. If it is not provided in it, we'll have to find related knowledge somewhere else. That's usually difficult for us (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Meili also found it difficult to find references due to shortness of time and limited access to reference books and good libraries.

> We do not have time to look up the background knowledge to the texts in our book if it is not provided either in the notes to the text or in the teacher's manual. Besides, we don't have a library. I myself do not have a good collection of reference books (Meili, 22-01-97).

Dingmei held whether culture gets taught in class depends much on the teachers' attitudes towards culture and the role of culture in the learning of a language. If the teacher regards it as important to provide students with such knowledge and is personally interested in it, he/she will probably have developed a good knowledge of it him/herself and will usually make an extra

effort to find the related information for students when necessary. Dingmei herself is a good example in this case. She believes,

> The culture of the people who use the language is part of the entire language learning project. You can't separate culture from the language. Besides, students are generally interested in it and introducing some cultural knowledge can help to motivate students to learn (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

Dingmei also gave an example of how she had integrated English cultural knowledge into teaching of the language. In the month before the present study, she taught a lesson on Christmas and she found her students interested in it and learned English faster.

> Last month was the Western Christmas time. As you know, Christmas is very popular in China now.... Students like to send friends Christmas cards and gifts. I thought it would be interesting to them if I could give them some background of the festival. So in class, I told my students what Christmas really is, how Western people celebrate it, how is it compared with the Chinese Spring Festival. They found that intriguing. They have never learned new words so fast. By the end of the lesson, many of them were able to remember and spell words [or phrases] like 'Christmas', 'Christmas tree', 'Christmas Father'. Some could even spell the word 'stocking'.... I find cultural knowledge can be very good English teaching materials for my students (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

Because of her own interest in English culture and her belief of teaching culture to the students, Dingmei has a good collection of related reference books and often looks up the related information for students when she is preparing classes.

> I have always been fascinated by the English culture. I have got quite a few books on it. They are very useful to my teaching. I often have to look up something in them. When I teach it to my students, they are always interested (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

However, Dingmei would still prefer that such knowledge is provided by the textbook writer. She explains,

> There are times when I have no time to look up something in the references. Also, sometimes, I may not be able to find what I need in my books. That's very frustrating. When the knowledge is provided in the textbook notes, it saves the teacher time and can make sure that students have a chance to hear or read this (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

Such a problem is not considered as serious at the tertiary level. When asked about integrating culture in their teaching, both Haigang and Fanke said that they, and most of their colleagues, did make the effort to teach their students related cultural knowledge. They were also more confident in finding it in reference books.

> Language is inseparable from culture. When we teach the language, we have to teach the culture. I have learned some myself. Besides, I can always go to a reference to find the information that I need (Fanke, 13-01-97).

> We teach our students a lot of English culture when we teach them English. We offer a course called *Background to Great Britain and the United States*. It is a compulsory course. Every student has to take it (Haigang, 15-01-97).

However, Chenli did not like the idea of offering a separate course on English culture. She felt it better to integrate the related cultural knowledge into the language class.

> I remember when I was studying in the teacher education program, I had to take a course called Introduction to English Culture. I just found it so boring. You were always to memorize this or that to prepare for the exams. It really didn't help me much in learning English. I prefer to integrate the cultural knowledge into the English class. When learning a certain passage, the related information can be taught to students (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Difficulties in Finding Appropriate Textbooks

The other major concern for the teachers was the textbook. Textbooks are very important for Chinese teachers and students. The teachers were generally unhappy with the old textbooks which were still used in some grades when this study was done.

> The old textbook... was developed with grammar as the outline. It was not a textbook but a grammar book. Students do not learn English but English grammar (Meili, 08-01-97).

The teachers also found that many of the reading materials in the texts are detached from students' lives and uninteresting. There are two disadvantages as a result. First, the materials are not going to interest the students. Second, students cannot learn the vocabulary that they need to express themselves. Thus, to some extent, this also explains students' poor communicative abilities.

> ....It is about the contents of the textbook. The texts and dialogues are uninteresting and irrelevant to students' lives. For instance, I did not know Christmas and what that meant until I finished my study at the teachers' training school. I did not know how to say 'pear', 'peach' in English until I learned them later at work (Dingmei, 14-01-97).
>
> The texts do not have much to do with students' lives. There are a lot of excerpts of world literature in them. Students could not see the connection between English and their life or their future career. Thus soon many of them lose interest in it (Fanke, 13-01-97).

Some schools in China have started to use a series of new textbooks. Teachers generally found that they are better compared with the old ones. There are more dialogues in them and the language is more related to students' lives and thus more interesting. Nevertheless, the teachers also found problems with the new textbooks, including still too much grammar, few reinforcing activities or exercises, and inadequate information.

> A year ago, I started to use the new textbook. Compared with the old one, there have been some radical changes, like it emphasizes situational language teaching. However, on the whole, they have not been able to get away from the model of teaching grammar instead of English (Dingmei, 14-01-97).
>
> The new book is more interesting because the language is more related to students' lives. But, there are problems with them. The biggest problem is that the lessons are not very well-organized. They have a very loose structure. For instance, quite often a grammar point appears in the text, naturally we need to pull it out and explain it to kids. But then there are no matching exercises at the end of the text. This has made it very difficult for us teachers and for students as well (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Haigang complained that he had difficulty in finding appropriate listening and speaking materials for his students.

> Another major problem is the teaching materials. We do not have good listening and speaking materials for the students. There are some listening and speaking course books in the book stores. But most of them are simply an amalgamation of some dialogues and reading passages. The editors of such textbooks do not have a clear language learning and teaching philosophy when they are editing or compiling such books. Thus, when teachers and students use them, they quite often ran into problems and difficulties (Haigang, 15-01-97).

Textbooks are actually particularly a problem for elementary schools. In most provinces in China, there are no textbooks for elementary students. They are using textbooks for junior middle schools. Naturally, they are too difficult for the elementary school pupils.

Teacher's Poor Living Conditions

All the respondents also felt strongly that they were not treated as they should be and this has discouraged them from doing a good job in English teaching.

The first thing that the teachers mentioned as a problem was the poor pay they were getting. Several of them complained that they did not make much money by being a teacher. Sometimes, they had to work at a second job to make enough money to support the family. What really made them upset was that they did not even make as much money as factory or company workers.

> I have been a teacher for 8 years. I found I have made very little money. Our life condition is thus far from being satisfactory. I have to teach some evening classes outside the university to make some money to help with the family expenses (Haigang, 06-01-97).

> I have been teaching for over thirty years. My daughter works in a company. This is her second year and she is making much more money than I do. She asked me the other day, 'Daddy, why do you still want to be a teacher? You'd better quit teaching and find something else to do' (Yanbo, 04-01-97).

Chinese teachers normally can not afford to buy their own house. They depend on their teaching institutions for living quarters. So the second thing that the teachers were concerned about was that they could not get decent living quarters from the government. On the contrary, many workers in factories and companies can live in larger apartments. Dingmei said jokingly,

> Elementary teachers like me do not have much freedom in deciding their marriage. They have to marry people who not only have money but also have decent living quarters. Elementary school teachers are poor and they can never expect to get living quarters from the government (Dingmei, 30-12-96).

Fanke also expressed his frustration.

> I like to be a teacher. But I don't like the living conditions I'm in right now. I have been teaching for over ten years, We are still living in a one-bedroom apartment. My daughter will be in grade 8 next year (Fanke, 02-01-97).

When discussing this problem, Meili told something which is more depressing.

> Well, honestly, my salary allows me to live a very moderate life, nothing more than that. With the inflation over the past few years, it is harder to live on my salary now. To deal with the expenses of the family, I have to tutor some students after work. Also, I have taught for more than 25 years and so far have not got my own apartment from the school. Truly, these worries have been very discouraging.
>
> While I am complaining, I have to say I'm very fortunate that I have finally transferred to a school in the urban area. This Spring Festival, I went to see some of my former colleagues in the suburban elementary school. They told me that they had not received their full salary for almost three years. They had been living on 80-85% of their salary. Besides, many of them had not been able to get reimbursement for their medical expenses. They still have the receipts in their pockets, waiting to be reimbursed.
>
> While they complained about their misfortunes, they also felt that they were fortunate compared with thousands of teachers who were assigned to teach in those poor counties. One teacher told me that one of her former classmates had been working in a poor county for nearly 30 years, and she had so far never received her salary. All she got in a year was several hundred *yuan* on or around the National Teachers' Day (Meili, 29-12-96).

The teachers felt that these worries about life take away their time and energy from their work. Besides, the unsatisfactory treatment for them discourages them from doing a good job in teaching. The respondents emphasized that this is not a problem of English teachers but a problem of all teachers, and it is not just a problem of the teaching profession but a problem of almost all intellectuals of the country. It seems that the more education one gets, the poorer he/she will be in China. This has actually had a very negative influence upon Chinese education.

Summary

The respondents believed that it is very important for these problems to be addressed. Yanbo's comments summarized what they said.

> There are many problems in English teaching in China today. We have to find solutions to these problems. Otherwise, our English teaching will not be able to progress and hence can not meet the needs of our country's modernizations and our country's participation in the international affairs (Yanbo, 11-01-97).

Desire for Changes in English Teaching in China

Another theme that has emerged in the study is that all respondents expressed desire for changes in the English classroom teaching. When teachers were discussing that Chinese students often could not carry out a decent conversation in English after a few years of learning the language and also the students were unprepared in English cultural knowledge, they also felt the urge for changes in English teaching in China. Meili suggested that her students should probably learn to speak and listen to English for a few years before learning to read and write in English.

> We have learned to speak Chinese for at least four years before we start school and study Chinese reading and writing and grammar. I wonder, why can't we let our kids learn to listen to and speak English for a couple of years before we teach them any reading, writing and grammar (Meili, 08-01-97)?

Chenli stressed the necessity of changing the class structure from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness. Students should be given more opportunities to practice using English.

> In China, more and more people have come to realize that teaching, particularly language teaching, should be student-centered instead of

> teacher-centered. Students should be the focus of the English class; teachers can only be a facilitator of different activities. Students should have more opportunities to practice English listening and speaking in class (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Fanke expressed his dislike for the separation of the four skills (that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and hence devising separate courses for the respective skills. To him, the four skills cannot be separated from one another. They develop simultaneously in the learner. He thinks the four skills should be integrated into just one course *English* rather than *English Listening, English Speaking, English Reading and English Writing.*

> There should be no separation at all. All these skills should be put together in one course. There should be only one course for students: comprehensive English, which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this way, we won't have teachers of English reading, teachers of English listening and speaking, et cetera. Instead, only teachers of English. We can assign more teachers to one big class to lead small group activities or have smaller classes (Fanke, 13-01-97).

For English major students in China, the problem is that whether in a comprehensive university, foreign languages institute or a teachers' university, English major students take similar courses in their undergraduate studies. In all these programs a lot of time and energy have been spent on English linguistics and literature while some other courses fundamental to students' future jobs are overlooked. Haigang recommended changes should be made in the curriculum.

> As you know, I'm the director of the English section. Every year, we need to hire new teachers. If we take a look at the applicants' CV, we can see that although they are from different kinds of universities, they have taken very similar courses: Intensive English Reading, Extensive English Reading, English Listening and Speaking, English Grammar, General Linguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Semantics and History of English Literature, British Literature, American Literature, English Poetry and so on. Such courses are not really helpful to them in terms of what they are going to do after graduation. It seems that they are all going to be

> English linguists or literature experts. We need to make some changes about these programs so that what the students learn at school will be more relevant to their careers. For instance, in grade one, I think students should study English speaking and listening only. Also, I think that the reading passages for students are generally too difficult for them. Easier passages will enable students comprehend better instead of feeling intimidated. This way, students are encouraged to practice more. When they come to the second year, they can have more courses in English reading and writing. In the third year, not only literature and linguistics but more courses that can prepare the students for what they are going to be after graduation should be offered to them (Haigang, 15-01-97).

Although these teachers might not have a complete understanding of CLT, their conversations showed their rich experience in teaching English in China and their deep thinking and understanding of language teaching. Their ideas -- beginning English learning with listening and speaking, changing teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness, adopting an integrated approach to language teaching, and making curricular changes to better meet learners' needs -- match the contemporary theory and research on language learning and teaching. However, because of the limitations such as the teachers' competency in oral English and cultural knowledge, the large class size, grammar-based exams, limited time and resources, etc., the teachers could not promote their belief in their own classrooms.

Understanding of Communicative Language Teaching and its Potential for English Teaching in China

All the respondents felt that teaching methodology is very important and the most important among the different factors in English teaching. To them, a proper methodology will help students learn English well.

> The teaching method is very important. If the teacher uses a good method, then his students will be able to learn English well and will be

> able to use lots of English that they have learned in class (Meili, 08-01-97).

To the respondents, some of the problems that Chinese English teaching is facing now are the outcomes of using inappropriate methods. These teachers were convinced that CLT, the most recent development in second/foreign language teaching methodology, has a great deal to offer to English teaching in China. For this reason, several of them indicated desires to learn more about English teaching methodology in general and CLT in particular.

Dingmei stated clearly that she was going to do a Master's Degree in English teaching methodology and she also expressed interest in working on CLT for elementary school English teaching.

> My next goal is to sit the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies next year. I wish to study more about CLT because I believe it is really useful to our English teaching. I am interested in finding out how I can best make use of CLT to help elementary school English teaching (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

Haigang was planning to study English teaching methodology in an English-speaking country. He expressed similar views about why he wanted to work more on methodology.

> ... I would like to go to study in an English-speaking country. As a teacher of English, if I do not go out to further my study in an English-speaking country, I will be, to use a Chinese idiom, 'making carts behind closed doors (*bi men zao che*)'. When I go to an English country, I would like to work on English teaching methodology. I would like to learn more about the Communicative Approach. I believe it has potential for our English teaching (Haigang, 06-01-97).

What the teachers found most useful of CLT is its idea that language is the primary tool of communication and can only be learned through true

communication. They held that such an idea is useful in helping Chinese teachers get more appropriate understanding of language learning.

> After I read about CLT in journals, I liked it because it helped me better understand why we learn a language and how we can best learn it. As a teacher, I also began to think what changes I could make in classroom teaching to help my students (Yanbo, 11-01-97).

Fanke believed that CLT is useful in addressing the problem that in China, language is mainly learned as grammar rather than a tool for communicating with others. In classroom teaching, it could help Chinese teachers shift their focus from structure to use of the language they are teaching.

> I believe the greatest thing that CLT has to offer to the English teaching in China is its understanding of language for communication and can only be learned through real communication. In China, we used to believe, and many people still do today, that language learning is learning its grammar. Therefore in an English class, we would spend probably 90% of the time on English structures. After getting to know CLT, hopefully we Chinese teachers can focus more on how to use English when we teach English (Fanke, 13-01-97).

Chenli said that CLT convinced her that teachers should give students many opportunities to use the language in class. Though she had difficulties, she had been trying to provide as many opportunities for students' practice as possible.

> I like CLT because I think it correctly pointed out to me that students need a lot of practice to learn English. For my students, English classroom is the only time and place where they can practice using English. So I have been trying to give them a lot of practice, though this isn't always easy (Chenli, 09-01-97).

For Haigang, what CLT helped him understand was that he was made aware that emphasis should be placed on developing students' listening and speaking abilities and also meaning should always been stressed in teaching

English reading to students. Besides, Haigang also felt that some of strategies such as group work, pair work, role-plays can also be helpful to his teaching.

> One of the benefits that I've got out of CLT is that it helped me realize that it is very important to put more emphasis on English listening and speaking. We should change our class focus from grammar and pattern drills to the practice of using the language for real communication. Also, it brought me to the understanding that meaning should be stressed when teaching reading to my students. I used to work on the language points with a text. I regretted that I did that. But now, I used the passages in the textbooks to train my students how to look for information they need from reading. I am also getting to use more role plays and group activities in my teaching (Haigang, 15-01-97).

All respondents were positive about the possible contributions that CLT has for improving English teaching in China. They were also positive about the possibility of introducing CLT into China. However, they seemed to have different expectations as to how much of CLT can be introduced into their classrooms. To Dingmei, CLT can help Chinese English teaching practitioners and researchers reshape their conception of language learning and teaching. But Chinese English teachers should consider their own situations and particularly the present conditions of English teaching in the country when they try to use CLT in China. Dingmei asserted that a complete adoption of CLT is impossible because of the many constraints such as large class size, unsupportive English learning environment, grammar-based examinations, strong traditional educational philosophy (see the next section for a complete discussion).

> We can use the theories of CLT to help us reconceptualize English learning and teaching in China. But we need to stand on our own ground and base our English teaching on the situations here in this country. We can not simply do what others do. I see no possibility of a complete adoption of CLT into China (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Yanbo was convinced that CLT has much to offer to English teaching in China. However, considering the present situations of English teaching in China, it can only be experimented and maybe used in some institutions where there are better human and technological resources, for instance, in some key universities, foreign language institutes and key secondary schools. The better human and technological resources include smaller classes, teachers with higher language proficiency, comparatively more funding, etc..

> After experimenting with it in different schools, I think it is not possible to require an average school or an average class to use the Communicative Approach. Only those key schools and key classes can probably benefit from it. In a word, for now, it can only be used in some classes of some schools where there are better conditions for CLT (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Haigang is the most enthusiastic among the six teachers about adopting CLT into China. He held that CLT should and can be used in China because he had used quite a lot of CLT with his students. However, he admitted there were a number of difficulties he had encountered in his attempts with CLT.

Difficulties in Using Communicative Language Teaching in China.

While all the respondents agreed that CLT is helpful to English teaching in China, they felt that there are many difficulties for them to implement it now, considering the current situations. The difficulties that they saw were varied. They involved difficulties on the part of the teacher, the students, the present educational system in China and communicative language teaching itself .

Difficulties on the Part of the Teacher

The respondents were quick to point out that some problems with themselves had stopped them from applying CLT in their practice. Major constraints on the

part of the teacher reported by the respondents included: deficiency in spoken English; deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English; lack of training in CLT; misconceptions of CLT; few opportunities for retraining in CLT; little time and expertise for developing materials for communicative classes; and lack of professional, administrative and collegial support.

Deficiency in spoken English. While the respondents generally felt that they were good at English grammar, reading and writing, they all agreed that they were not competent in English listening and speaking. Chenli's feeling of his English proficiency is typical among the Chinese teachers.

> I am poor at spoken English. I learned English a long time ago. Our teachers taught us English grammar. My teachers did not speak much English in class. We as students did not speak much either. I have always been ashamed of my oral English. I have taught English for over thirty years but I do not speak good English at all. This is really sad for me (Chenli, 17-02-97).

Fanke felt incompetent in his oral English too.

> My reading ability in English is, I think, pretty good. But my oral English is really not that great. I make mistakes when I speak English. I falter a lot too. I just find it really too difficult to express in English what I want to say. ...My listening ability in English is a bit better but I still find it hard to follow a native English speaker (Fanke, 21-02-97).

They considered that their own deficiency in spoken English had hindered them from applying CLT in their classrooms. They found it hard to use CLT when they themselves do not speak good English.

> To teach students communicative competence is really a big challenge, because our own communicative competence is a big problem. I am very poor at spoken English. I am very much like most Chinese teachers. I can read fairly well, but, as for expressing myself in English, it is a huge problem. So basically, there is no way for me to use the Communicative

> Approach if my own listening and speaking abilities stay like this (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

However, Dingmei and Meili, who both taught at elementary schools, looked at this somewhat differently. They both admitted that their spoken English was deficient but they thought that they could still teach lessons in English. Even if they were to teach a lesson using CLT, their English should not be too much of a problem. Dingmei explained,

> I am aware that my oral English is a weakness of mine. I feel intimidated when I meet native English speakers. My students would call out to them "Hello. What's your name?" I would be so nervous as to make more mistakes than I should when I talk to them. The reason is very clear. I do not speak good English and besides I don't have that self-confidence.
>
> However, I don't think it is a problem to run a class in English in elementary school, because, really, an elementary school English teacher does not need much English. Much of the classroom English gets used again and again. Besides, elementary school students do not know much and they generally do not leave their textbooks that far (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Meili shared this view.

> To teach in English is not a problem for me. If you run a very structured class, you can do a pretty good pre-class preparation and you know what is going to happen in class. Even if the class is not that structured, it is still all right. To teach English at the elementary school does not really need much English. After all, students will only do and say what their teachers tell them to (Meili, 22-01-97).

In fact, Dingmei was very optimistic about teaching in English in elementary schools. Many of the senior elementary school teachers are being replaced by young college graduates who generally have much better command of oral English. In addition, the government's policy of upgrading elementary school teachers will facilitate practicing teachers to improve their English.

> Besides, English teachers in elementary schools are, on the whole, fairly young in age. Most of us are below 35 years old. What this tells us in that most of us are graduates of formal teacher preparation colleges and have received fairly good training in English and usually have a good command of it. Also, the government has recently issued a policy requiring that all elementary school teachers must be at least college diploma holders. This has pushed many in-service English teachers to study in order to meet the requirement.
>
> Also, many senior teachers have retired and those who haven't are retiring. Usually, senior teachers do not speak much English. Most of them have never formally studied in an English education department or program, thus do not speak much English. They are usually those who are against using English only in class. They would cry that too much English is impossible because students do not understand us... (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Haigang was the most confident in his English among the participants. He reported that he had always taught in English and he felt that he had made progress in spoken English since he started teaching through using English in teaching. Yet he said that he would not consider himself fluent in English and suggested that he might have difficulty when running a real communicative class.

My observations of Haigang teaching seemed to show that his worry was true. When he was teaching English reading to a class of junior English major students, he used a lot of English. But there were a few times during a two-hour instruction when students asked him questions and he did not seem as prepared to explain to them in English. Actually, he had to use some Chinese to help make himself understood.

On the whole, the respondents did not consider that they had good English speaking and listening abilities. They generally felt constrained by their deficiency in oral English when trying to use CLT in China. The difference is that the two respondents from the elementary school did not seem to consider their oral English proficiency as much a constraint for them as the respondents

from the secondary schools, the reasons given being that one does not need as much English to teach elementary school students as to teach middle school or university students.

Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence. All of the respondents considered that their low strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English had discouraged them from attempting CLT in their classrooms. As there is a much greater demand for the teacher's sociolinguistic and strategic competence in a communicative classroom than in a traditional grammar-focused classroom, they generally felt incompetent to conduct a communicative class. They were afraid of losing control over the class and hence losing face before their students when they could not answer their questions related to the sociolinguistic knowledge of the English language.

> Also, the teacher needs to prepare very carefully, especially for those [topics] that are related to English culture. We usually go to reference books before class and this helps. But still we feel it difficult. If we use communicative language teaching, all our students may ask different questions any time in class. There is no way to predict what they are going to ask. I am not worried about them asking questions about grammar. Actually, I quite enjoy them. But when they ask questions related to the sociolinguistic aspects of English, I am not sure that I'll be able to answer them. That's very threatening and embarrassing (Fanke, 21-01-97).

Haigang also felt intimidated by the possibility of not being able to answer students' questions. He described one of his teaching incidents:

> Last year, there was a time when I had relatively more time. I thought of trying some real CLT with my students. To do this, I found a book on CLT and prepared a lesson. When I was actually teaching this lesson, I was really worried. The class atmosphere was so different from what I was used to. The students were in high spirits when told to complete the activities. They asked many questions. There were quite a few times I could not give them immediate answers. They might ask very simple questions related to the English culture, but I really did not have answers

> for them. I felt so ashamed and tired when the lesson was over. After that, I did not feel I wanted to teach this kind of lesson often. After all, I am the teacher, so I need to give them a good answer when they come to me for help. If I can't give them an answer, why should they call me teacher? ... I'll lose face if I cannot answer their questions. Students will talk about me behind my back. I knew we did when I was a student. Therefore, this cannot happen often. If you let this happen often, you'll lose their respect for you (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Yanbo cited an example that he had to show his deficiency in sociolinguistic competence.

> I remember once I taught my students the phrase 'to pass away'. During the class break, one of my students came up to me with a piece of paper. On the paper were several words and phrases: 'to die', 'to expire', 'to pass away', and 'to kick the bucket'. He asked me what were the differences among them. I felt really ashamed because I was not able to give him an immediate answer. Later I learned that the student got a dictionary of English thesaurus as a gift and he brought it to class that day (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Because of their deficiency in sociolinguistic competence in English and fear of losing respect of their students, and because they might not be able to provide immediate answers to students' questions in class, the teachers chose to stick to the traditional grammar-centered, text-centered and teacher-centered methods so that they always had a good idea about what was going to happen in every class and made adequate preparations for it.

Lack of training in CLT. Lack of training in CLT was referred to by all the participants as one of the major obstacles to their applying CLT in their practice. As reported by the teachers, they had learned or learned about CLT in different ways. Haigang and Dingmei learned about it in an English methods course in teacher education programs; Chenli heard about it in conversations with fellow teachers in and outside her school; Yanbo read about it in English teaching journals, Fanke and Meili heard about it at local English teaching conferences. One thing in common among them was that they thought they

really did not have a good understanding of CLT. When asked to define CLT, Dingmei said,

> As I have mentioned, we teachers are really very weak in language teaching theories. As to the definition of CLT, to me, it is to let students use linguistic knowledge to communicate and interact with others. So in class, I try to give them as many opportunities as possible for them to use the language to dialogue. What else does CLT mean or require us to do, I really have no idea (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Fanke summarized the situation in these words.

> Many of us just heard about CLT. What we know is probably the name of the method. We really have little idea as to how to use CLT, what's the role of the teacher, what's the role of the students, etc.. If we have students practice some dialogues, we think that we are using CLT (Fanke, 21-01-97).

My observation of the teachers teaching supports what Fanke said. At one point of the research, I asked the teachers to teach a communicative lesson. In these lessons, the students would listen to some dialogues in English from recorded cassettes and were frequently called out to make dialogues in pairs. The teachers would claim that they taught a communicative lesson.

Interestingly, the teachers did seem to be aware of their incomplete understanding of CLT.

> My understanding of CLT is that we should help our students learn English through ample listening and speaking practice in English. That's what we understand as CLT. I believe that's how secondary school English teachers understand it. Whether it is accurate requires further studies and research on our side. This is how we understand it (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Another thing in common among them was that they had not practiced CLT much.

> I learned about CLT when I was studying at university. We were just taught what the definition was and the characteristics of the methodology. We did not get a chance to use it, or even a chance to consider whether we should use it and how to use it in China. I did try it a few times later when I became a teacher. That was just my personal interest (Dingmei, 20-01-97).
>
> I learned the term CLT from my fellow teachers. It seemed interesting and useful to us. But I really can't say I know and practiced much CLT (Chenli, 17-02-97).

This lack of systematic training led to the teachers' sketchy and usually fragmented understanding about CLT, and made it difficult for them to leave the security of the traditional methods and take the risk of trying new unfamiliar methods. Ironically, their earlier revealed understanding of the theoretical base of CLT and the related need for sociolinguistic knowledge would support CLT practice. They are also clear about the need for teachers to have good communication fluency in English in order to use CLT.

Few opportunities for retraining in CLT. The respondents also reported the fact that few opportunities and few appropriate programs were available to inservice teachers for retraining in CLT. First, there are not many opportunities for teachers to get retraining. Chenli had one year of retraining in over thirty years of teaching service. Dingmei found her own way of retraining, that is, going through the Self-Taught Examination System to get a diploma first and then a B.A.. The rest of them did not have any inservice training yet at all. Meili expressed her frustration when asked about her inservice education.

> I have taught English for almost 20 years. I have not been able to participate in an inservice teacher education program. I would really like to get a chance to have some training. Usually I am very busy and it is hard for me to upgrade myself in what is going on in English teaching. It would be very nice if I can take some time off my work and do some reading and hear people talking about new ideas in language teaching (Meili, 22-01-97).

Another problem is that, even if they manage to find such opportunities, they might not get much training in CLT in teacher retraining programs, or simply not much methodology or much professional development in these programs. The teachers reported that from 1995 there have been actually more inservice training opportunities for teachers. But many of the programs still put their primary stress on the improvement of teachers' linguistic competence. In the entire program, there is no or little teaching methodology study or general study of curriculum and education. For instance, the teachers would do a lot of English linguistics and literature in such programs. In the province where this study was done, special arrangements have been made between the education board and one of the major comprehensive universities in the city (a non-teachers' university though there are several teachers' university and colleges in the city) so that some practicing teachers can study in such programs to get their Masters' Degree. But the courses that are offered in the programs are literature, linguistics and translation. Though such preparation will be helpful in improving teachers' subject matter knowledge, the professional development of the teachers is overlooked.

> I can't say that we have no in-service training opportunities, but they are very few and usually they are short-term training. The training will mainly be some further study in the subject matter knowledge. As for how to teach, what to teach and why, there is very little discussion in these programs (Chenli, 17-02-97).

> The problem with the present teacher-retraining programs is that many programs are not very well designed to help teachers. For instance, many of the programs offer mainly courses in literature and linguistics. Few programs offer courses in education, curriculum and teaching methodology. It is really not easy for a teacher to get retraining in CLT (Haigang, 10-02-97).

The same problem occurs with the pre-service teacher education program. In such programs, future teachers take mainly language and literature courses. In

the entire four years of study, students normally only take three education-related courses: pedagogy, psychology and, when teachers are available, subject-specific teaching methodology.

Dingmei also indicated her worries of not being able to find an appropriate supervisor when she starts her Masters'.

> ...There don't seem to be many professors of English education around. I would like to do a MA in English teaching methodology. But it seems that it is going to be difficult for me because I might not be able to find an appropriate supervisor in this area in the several universities in this city (Dingmei, 30-12-96).

On the whole, there are few opportunities for teachers to get inservice training, or even if they get such opportunities, they are not likely to get many education-related courses. So it is very difficult for teachers to get trained in CLT. Without appropriate retraining or short courses of CLT for teachers, misunderstandings of CLT among them should be anticipated.

Misconceptions about CLT. The above-mentioned lack of appropriate training for English teachers did indeed lead to serious misunderstandings about CLT among the teachers. First, to many teachers, CLT simply means listening and speaking for students. So, in their classes, whenever possible, they would give students opportunities to listen to English and practice dialogues in English. This over-simplified definition of CLT has prevented them from attempting CLT in its real sense.

Another typical misconception was that by concentrating on the use rather than simply on the form of the language CLT does not take care of form at all, and that by stressing fluency rather than only accuracy CLT neglects accuracy totally. Such a misunderstanding about CLT goes against Chinese teachers'

philosophy of language learning and teaching grounded in the EFL teaching in China.

To all of the respondents, grammar instruction is absolutely necessary for their Chinese students. They cited different reasons why Chinese students need to be taught grammar when learning English. First, they held that grammar can provide students with a framework of the English language, where students can fit in words and phrases later on.

> I don't like grammar, but I think it's important to teach kids grammar. To me, grammar is the framework. When kids do not have any idea about English, they need to be taught the grammar to help them construct the language in their mind. It is like putting together toy bricks. Also when the sentence is long, grammar is necessary to help them to master it. Once they have got the framework, they can fit in words (Dingmei, 14-01-97).

The teachers also believed that once the students are provided with the patterns, students can substitute different parts of the sentences with words they know and produce new sentences to express themselves. This will finally lead to creative use of the English language.

> .... Besides, if we teach them grammar, it can help them move towards creative use of the language. When I teach them a sentence structure, they will be able to use the pattern to make new sentences (Meili, 08-01-97).

The teachers also felt that Chinese is really different from the English language in grammar. Some instruction of English grammar and some comparison and contrasts of the two grammars can be very helpful to the Chinese students.

> Yes, grammar is necessary....The Chinese language is so different from the English language. If we do not teach any grammar and discuss with our students some major differences in the grammar of these two languages, students will find it hard to learn the language. And for teachers, no matter which method you use, if there is no grammar, I

> don't think that Chinese students can really learn English well in our EFL situations (Haigang, 15-01-97).

Another reason they suggested was that in China students do not have a good English learning environment. They have English instruction for only a couple of hours in a week and the classroom is the only place where they can hear, read and speak English. They need grammar to help with after-class review, which is expected of all Chinese students.

The teachers also thought that knowledge of English grammar can actually help students with comprehension and communicate with others in English.

> In my experience, it is important to teach our students grammar. Maybe in the first year when they study English, they may not need to learn that much grammar, but after that, I believe they need to learn English grammar. Otherwise, they will find it hard to understand when they read English. I have talked with my students, and they generally feel grammar helps them understand. For instance, in English there are a lot of clauses. If the subject of a sentence has an attributive clause, the verb of the sentence will be separated from the subject. When the students find two verbs in the sentence, they are lost. At this time they have to go back to their knowledge of the English grammar so that they see the relationship among the different parts of the sentence (Chenli, 09-01-97).

> For Chinese students learning English, it is not possible to expect them to learn English well if we don't teach them grammar. Because they do not have the listening and speaking environment, learning grammar can promote students to learn English, to succeed in the National Entrance Examinations, to help them in written communication and to complete translation tasks, particularly translation of English technical documents. When you do not have good expertise in the area you are translating, you have to rely upon grammatical analysis for help to do the translation (Yanbo, 11-01-97).

So, the necessity to teach Chinese students English grammar so that they can learn the language well as seen by the Chinese teachers is in conflict with their

misunderstandings that CLT did not teach grammar at all. For that reason, the teachers had reservations about using CLT in their practice.

Little time and expertise for material development. The respondents also felt that their little time and expertise for developing communicative materials had been a constraint for them. Since all the English textbooks had been developed under the influence of the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods before the publication of the new series of textbooks which had just been adopted by some teachers in some schools, teachers had to develop their own materials and design their own activities if they wanted to use CLT in their classes.

The first problem for this is that teachers felt that they were already over-loaded with teaching, paper or exercise grading and lesson planning, and any additional work would be too much for them.

> My day is like this. My work hours are 7:50 a.m. - 11:40 a.m. and 1:40 p.m. - 4:40 p.m. The lunch break is from 11:40 a.m. to 1:40 p.m. Every day I teach two classes of English and two classes of Chinese to different grades. I grade exercise-books, prepare for new classes. In the late afternoon, I teach a tutoring class when I tutor students either English or Chinese. From the morning when I come to work till the late afternoon when I go home, I am teaching different classes and grading papers or exercises of different subjects. I just have no time for other things. In the evening when I get home, I have to prepare for the next day's class (Meili, 29-12-96).

Dingmei also talked about her heavy workload as an elementary school teacher. Besides teaching, grading students' exercises, going to meetings, she often had duties from being a host teacher, a teacher designated to be fully responsible for all the academic and social lives of a class or a grade.

> During the day, I do not have a minute's rest, always busy with classes, exercises, and meetings. I always have some things on my mind, even

> when I'm not at work.... In the evening, I have to prepare for the next day's work. I need to consider what I'm going to teach, how I am going to teach it and whether I've got everything that I will need to teach such a lesson. All day long, I am concerned with these things. When I am a host-teacher for a class, then I will have more to worry about (Dingmei, 30-12-96).

For Chenli, she is always short of time. In addition to teaching and grading students' exercises, her duties as a host teacher also take a lot of her time. She has to monitor students' activities, go to host teacher meetings and hold teacher-parent conferences.

> I found no time doing extra work. First because now we only work for five days, we have to cram six days' work into five days. That has made us very busy. I teach two classes of English every day. I have to grade the students' exercises. Besides, I am a host teacher of two classes and that involves a lot of duties. I have to look after the students cleaning the classrooms for twice a day. Sometimes, when my classes are assigned to clean up a certain part of the campus, quite often I have to do the cleaning for my students. Many of them do not know how to do the work since they have never done this kind of work before as they are the only child of their family. Besides, I need to monitor my students throughout the day. From time to time, I need to deal with some accidents in the class. Besides, teacher-parent conferences also take a lot of my time. This is more of a problem these years since there are more and more students' parents getting divorced. I often have to spend time talking with students and their parents (Chenli, 17-02-97).

For Yanbo, besides duties as a teacher, he has a lot of administrative duties. It was the most difficult for me to schedule interviews with him. We ended up in having all the four major interviews on four Saturday afternoons.

To teach in universities also involves a lot of work. Besides teaching, they are under the pressure for research and publications.

> Teachers teach an average of 10 hours in a week. If we just think of 10 hours a week, we may think that the teachers are not busy. But the fact is that many of the teachers in this department are teachers both husband and wife. Usually, if both the husband and the wife teach 10 hours a

> week plus taking care of a child, they are very busy. Also, almost all the teachers need to teach some extra classes outside this university to make some money to meet the expenses of their families. This leaves them little time for other things. What's more, they are under constant pressure to publish in order to get promotion to the next step of the hierarchy of academic titles and get a bigger living quarters from the university (Fanke, 12-01-97).

The problem of lack of time is a particularly serious problem for women teachers because they also have to deal with housework for the family.

> During lunch break I have to go home to prepare lunch for my family. Right after school is over in the afternoon, I have to rush to pick up my child from the kindergarten. As soon as I get home, I have to do family chores like washing clothes, preparing dinner, etc. Though my husband helps me, I still find I am very busy. Besides I have to tutor my child (Meili, 29-12-96).

Women are the majority of the English teaching staff at all levels of Chinese education. Even at the university level, there are not many male English teachers. Haigang told about his frustration of not being able to hire male teachers for his English section.

> For instance, the majority of the teachers in the English Section are female teachers. We're now hiring new teachers for next year. So far, we've received more than 10 applications. But all the applicants are female (Haigang, 15-01-97).

In addition, lack of expertise in designing communicative activities was also another concern among the teachers. They reported that they had never been taught how to develop materials and they did not have much practice in it. They generally felt incompetent for the task.

> Even if I have enough time, I don't think I can write good communicative materials. First, I have never learned how to do it. Second, there are few authentic English materials around. That means I have to create everything, which is really beyond me. It also means that I have to spend more time than I can afford (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

> I personally don't believe that I or other elementary school teachers have the ability to develop materials for our students. I don't have the expertise in material development. I have never learned it in my teacher education programs. After all, we are elementary school teachers, we don't have the deep insights into English teaching and learning theory. We might be able to provide some useful suggestions based upon our teaching experience but we can't write materials ourselves (Dingmei, 17-02-97).

It needs to be pointed out that Haigang and Fanke did not seem to worry about their ability to write EFL materials. As a matter of fact, they are both EFL material developers in China. But they both felt pressured for time.

So on the whole, Chinese teachers, for such practical reasons as lack of time and expertise in material development, had either given up after a brief try or simply had not ventured to try CLT.

Lack of professional, administrative and collegial support. Another constraint that the respondents felt was the fact that they often could not get the support that they needed in using CLT. Since a great majority of them did not have a good education in CLT and were inexperienced in using it, they would often find themselves in need of help in one or more aspects of their practice with it. Unfortunately, they often found nobody who had the expertise to turn to for advice and assistance.

> I remember when I tried CLT, I had questions here and there. I first tried to talk to my fellow teachers but mostly they could not help me. I then went to find books on CLT. To my dismay, I could not find a good book on CLT. I really wished that I had someone to turn to for help and suggestions (Chenli, 17-02-97).

Teachers also found that often they could not get support from administrators. They found this really discouraging. They felt very stressed when they had to be responsible for all they were experimenting with. For example, Dingmei talked

about how English was treated as one of the unimportant subjects in her school until recently.

> .... Authorities in this city have not come to see the importance of English teaching yet. For example, for the principals of our school, they did not pay attention to English teaching at all before it was included in the Entrance Exam for Junior Middle School a couple of years ago. At that time, English was one of 'the five petite subjects', like music, physical education, fine arts, etc. that normally receives the least attention among the subjects offered in schools. English classes all gave way to Chinese and arithmetic in the four months preceding the Entrance Exams. Even today, there are some school principals who keep making requests that English should not be included in the Entrance Exams (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Dingmei also told about her being discouraged from pursuing her studies in English.

> ... When I first began to work towards my college diploma, I did not have much support from my school. I remember that I had a very difficult time in asking for a day's leave in order to sit one of the diploma exams. ... My school principals are interested in students' scores but not how you teach the course and I am judged according to the scores of my students in the Entrance Exams. There is no way to get support from them if I want to use the Communicative Approach (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

The two respondents from secondary schools also indicated that they seldom got support from teachers teaching other subjects in the same schools.

> There were times I needed cooperation from teachers of other subjects, but usually they were not interested in what I was doing. This was really disheartening. Actually, even if they could not help me, some of their understanding would make me feel good about what I was doing... (Chenli, 17-02-97).

Teachers generally found this lack of professional, administrative and collegial support discouraging. Often they would soon lose interest and motivation to cope with the challenges of using CLT in their classes. They would have to give up CLT and return to the peaceful and easy traditional method of teaching English.

Difficulties on the Part of the Students

The second major category of constraints came from their students. These concerns included the students' low English proficiency in general, the students' lack of motivation to work on oral English and the students' resistance to class participation

Low English proficiency. Most of the respondents reported that one of the major difficulties preventing them from using CLT was their students' low English proficiency. At present, students start to learn English in grade 5 in elementary school and then they have only three forty-minute English classes each week. They know no English when they start and the progression is slow due to limited hours of English instruction each week. In fact the students are expected to grasp only 200 English words when they finish the elementary school. The two elementary school teachers thought it would be hard to use CLT with them because they could not speak English to them.

> My students know no English when they start. They know very little English after they study it for a year. After all, they do not spend that much time on it.... There is no way to talk to them only in English (Meili, 22-01-97).

> I once tried to use lots of English with my students in class. They did not understand me. After a while, I found several of them sleeping or playing with their toys. When I called them to stand up as a punishment, they said 'I don't understand.' What can you do with them....Although they

> imitate very well and have good memory, CLT does not work well with them. I remember, one year I had a grade 5 class. I taught them 'what's your name?' without translating it into Chinese. They knew how to use the sentence, but then I found that they did not know what the word 'name' meant and what the word 'what' meant. They thought 'name' meant 'what' in Chinese and 'what' meant 'name' in Chinese (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

The two secondary school teachers, Chenli and Yanbo felt very much the same way. They found that although their students had learned English for at least two years prior to attending the secondary school, they were very low in English proficiency. They usually had a small English vocabulary and limited command of English structures. Because the students did not have the necessary level of English proficiency, the teachers found it hard to do communicative activities with them.

> Average middle school students know a limited number of English structures. They have a very small English vocabulary. So they have great difficulty to communicate with each other in English in class. It will be very difficult for them to carry out communicative activities efficiently. After much frustration, they would either go back to Chinese or simply lose interest in trying to speak English (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Haigang did not think of students' English proficiency as a constraint for him. He taught students who specialized in English language and literature. His experience was that they might have difficulty in following him at first, but in a few months' time they were able to understand much of what he said in English.

> Most of my students did not hear or speak English before they started in my class. To help them, I insisted on speaking only English in class. Some of my students would come to me and ask me to say even a few Chinese words to help them understand. But I usually would not give in, because I knew from my experience that was good for them to hear English only at this stage and they would come along soon. It was a phase that they had to go through... (Haigang, 15-01-97).

When asked whether this would work with non-English major university students, Haigang was positive about it. But Fanke was not so certain.

> I am not sure. Many of my students barely got the passing score in the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning. Besides, they are not so motivated to learn English as, say, English major students. After all, English is not their major (Fanke, 21-01-97).

Little motivation for communicative competence. The respondents also referred to students' lack of motivation to work on communicative competence as a major constraint for them trying CLT. Although an increasing number of people in China, including teachers, students, parents and administrators, have realized how important it is to be able to speak English rather than to know English grammar well, students at all levels still care much more about English grammar than speaking the language.

> If we change the method, students will probably welcome it in their heart. But they will still prefer to have the traditional method....They prefer to be taught the English grammar than how to speak in English (Fanke, 21-01-97).

> I know that my students like to learn to speak English in their heart. However, they do not have much time to spend on English, only a few hours each week, so most of them prefer to leave aside the development of their speaking ability during their years in secondary schools in order to focus on grammar, which can bring them more immediate reward (Chenli, 17-02-97).

The reason for this is that in China, for elementary and secondary school students, they all need to successfully complete a series of exams before they can continue their study at the next stage. For instance, elementary students have to sit the Entrance Examinations for Junior Middle School, junior middle students have to sit the Entrance Examinations for Senior Middle School, and Senior Middle School students have to sit the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning to enter the university. Each exam determines whether

students will be able to continue their education and what kind of school or university they will be able to attend. English is specified as one of the subjects in all these examinations. The English sections of the examinations are known to be grammar-based. In order to succeed in these exams, students prefer to work on English grammar than to work on their communicative competence, which is not tested in them.

University students have to pass some English exams before they can graduate and get their degrees. Non-English major students must successfully pass the English Examination Band-4 in order to get their Bachelor's degree and the English Examination Band-6 in order to be allowed to sit the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies. Then they have to sit another series of exams including English to be admitted into a Master's program and successfully complete English Examination Band-8 to get their Master's degree. Again the English exams are grammar-based. For students majoring in English, to receive their Bachelor's degree, they have to pass English Examination Band-8 for English Major Students, in which grammar plays a critical role.

Elementary, secondary and university students all have to worry about the grammar-based English examinations. Consequently they usually choose to spend more time and energy on grammar to ensure that they will get a good score in their English exams.

> In China, all teaching activities are organized around examinations. From elementary to secondary, from secondary to university, from undergraduate to graduate, from Master's to Ph.D. studies, all is decided by exams. So, students and teachers only care how to get high scores in exams and don't care how to use the language. Or at least while at school, they choose to focus on grammar for better scores in these exams (Fanke, 21-01-97).

> .... Students have to sit the Entrance Exams for Junior Middle School. They know that more time on grammar will help them get higher scores in the exam (Meili, 22-01-97).

> To be perfectly honest, the goal of our students learning English is to succeed in the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning. The English Examination tests a lot of grammar, so our students like to learn grammar and do grammar exercises. I teach them grammar because I want them to succeed. I know how critical it is for them to get good scores in such exams (Yanbo, 11-01-97).

Since grammar plays the decisive role in almost all English exams in China, teachers who teach communicative competence are not as well liked as those who teach grammar. Students complain that they are not learning anything if they do not learn a certain number of new words and grammar rules in a class.

> I once tried something different. I did not teach my students much grammar. I used the materials in the textbooks as materials for them to practice speaking. I actually quite enjoyed what I did. But then I got an unfavorable evaluation from the students. I was very upset with them. But later on when I calmed down I understood them. Wasn't I just like them when I was a student (Fanke, 21-01-97).

It needs to be noted that, according to Haigang, his students, who are university students majoring in English language and literature, do show interest in learning to speak English in addition to get a good mastery of the English grammar.

> My students are interested in English grammar, reading and writing. They are also interested in speaking and listening. Actually, I have seen an increase in their interest in speaking and hearing English (Haigang, 10-02-97).

When asked for reasons, Haigang explained,

> First, the students who are admitted into our department are those who have scored very high in the English Section in the National Entrance

> Examinations. They have had a very good command of the English grammar when they start in the university. They have the energy and time to work on their listening and speaking since English is their major. A more direct influence is that we offer courses like English Listening and English Speaking and give them regular oral and listening tests throughout their programs. They have to do well in listening and speaking in order to graduate and get the degree. However, I think the most important reason is perhaps the attraction of the job market. There has been an increasing demand for English-speaking personnel with more foreign and Sino-foreign companies built in China after the open-door policy and the introduction of the market economy. The jobs in these companies are much better paid than those in Chinese companies. To get into these companies, they need to have good communicative ability. So my students are interested in speaking English. You can easily find some of our students practicing English in one of the English Corners in the city (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Resistance to class participation. The respondents cited the students' resistance to class participation as a major constraint for trying CLT. As students have already been in school for at least a few years by the time they begin to learn English in the elementary or secondary schools, students have already become accustomed to the traditional classroom structure where students are supposed to sit motionless, take notes while the teacher lectures, and speak only when they are spoken to. After so many years of schooling in traditional settings, it is usually very difficult to get the students' participation in class. Chenli and Yanbo, who teach in the middle schools felt most strongly about this.

> It is really difficult to get my students to be active. I am not sure whether I am using CLT or not, but I sometimes give my students activities to complete. They are not eager to get involved. They just finish what they are asked to do and then sit there waiting for the next order from me (Chenli, 17-02-97).

> I have found that my students are not active in class. I am not saying that they do not work hard. They really do and take study most seriously. But they just do not feel like classroom participation. For instance, sometimes, I would call out a pair or a couple of students to come to the front of the class to role play a dialogue. You can see the lack of

> enthusiasm in them. I am very much discouraged by that too. That might be related to their age, or perhaps they have been in school for too long and are used to the traditional passive role in class (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Meili suggested that the inconsistencies among teachers as to their expectations of students' roles in class also discourage her students from participating in class activities.

> English class is probably the only place, if any, where participation is encouraged. Most teachers of other subjects probably do not encourage class participation. So this can actually bring about confusion for the students because teachers have different expectations for their roles in class (Meili, 22-01-97).

To play it safe, students usually choose to remain "traditional" in English class. The result of this is that the students are hardly motivated for active participation in class. Without students' active participation, there can be no CLT. In a word, the Chinese students are culturally different from those in America, United Kingdom, Canada and they have been socialized to expect roles for teachers and students that do not easily fit the assumptions of CLT.

Difficulties on the Part of the Educational System

The third major group of difficulties is related to the educational system in China. Three major constraints were identified, namely, large classes, grammar-based examinations and insufficient funding.

Large classes. The respondents felt strongly that the large class size had been one of the major constraints for their attempts with CLT. In China, there are usually over fifty students in one class in elementary and secondary schools. For universities, except English departments where smaller classes of around thirty students may be found, the class size is usually no smaller than that in secondary and elementary schools. So the teachers generally found it really

difficult, if not entirely impossible, to use CLT with so many students in one class.

> With 60 or 70 students in class, what the teacher often, and probably can do, is to have the students read together as a class or sometimes in large groups.... I guess the large size of class is one of the biggest problems. It makes it really difficult to use CLT (Chenli, 17-02-97).

Yanbo's response echoed Chenli's.

> The large class size in China is not conducive to language teaching. In an average school, there are usually 60 students in a class. It is really difficult to have the students do a lot of practice in English. The solution has to be that a lot more stress is put on reading and writing. With such big-scale activity, students are not motivated and thus learn very little English (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Dingmei also felt that classroom management would be a problem if she wanted to use CLT with such a class. She believed that it would be very difficult to monitor so many students when they are assigned to complete activities. Also, the possible noise would bring her complaints from other colleagues.

> There are now about 56 students in my class. It's very difficult to teach. Each period is 45 minutes. So generally in a class, each student has less than one minute to practice if the teacher does not say anything and does not spend any time on classroom management.
>
> By the way, classroom management would be a big problem if I use CLT. For example, when everyone starts to talk, the class can be very noisy. Teachers and students in nearby classrooms will complain about the noise (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Meili was also worried about not being able to provide individualized attention to each student in a large class and thus found it hard to ensure that everybody is on task in class.

> When there are 50, 60 or even 70 students in one class, it is very difficult to teach English to them. First, it will take a lot of time to complete just one round of practice. Besides, it is very difficult for me to take care of all these students and make sure that they are actually doing what they are required to do. Sometimes I gave them tasks to complete. When I was helping some students, I saw others chatting among themselves and leaving aside their work. I wanted to go over immediately to bring them back to work, but I sometimes had to give up. It's just too much for me, running around in the classroom (Meili, 22-01-97).

Grammar-based examinations. Grammar-based examinations were referred to by all the respondents as another major constraint. Among the many English examinations in secondary and elementary schools in China, the National Entrance Examination (the English Section) for Higher Learning is the most important one since the other formal and informal English examinations are all modeled after it. Until 1994 it consisted mainly of grammar, reading comprehension and translation.

> If we take a look at the exam papers, we can see that they are mainly grammar-based and reading comprehension is strongly emphasized. What is worse, the examination designers quite often go to extremes about grammar. Take multiple-choice questions as an example. Quite often the suggested choices after the question are all acceptable, but the students are asked to choose the 'best' one, which I often find is not necessarily so (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Yanbo agreed with Haigang on this.

> However, in our country, in the National Entrance Examinations, grammar and vocabs are emphasized. To prepare the students for the exams, we must teach students English grammar. So the National Entrance Examination is creating an unsupportive atmosphere for developing students' communicative competence (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

A few years ago, an additional part called listening comprehension was added to the Exam. But according to Chenli, the exam is still grammar-based.

> First, the listening comprehension section in the Exam only counts for 15-20%. This doesn't change the nature of it. I would say it is still very much grammar-based. Besides, the listening comprehension part is simply multiple-choice questions and fill-in-blanks. To complete these tasks one must still rely a lot on grammar knowledge (Chenli, 20-01-97).

Under such circumstances, teachers, under pressure to have their students do well on such tests, often devote valuable class time to teaching test taking skills, drilling students on multiple-choice items about grammar.

> Although we are teaching English in elementary schools, we have to teach to the exams too. As for listening and speaking, we still don't do much (Meili, 08-01-97).

> Sometimes, I told my students to come to school earlier to have an extra class of English from 1:00 p.m. to 1:40 p.m.. Chinese and math are the major courses for elementary kids and thus take most of their time. But I have to squeeze out some time from the students for English exercises too. I do not like to use their free time but I have to because I need to prepare them for the Entrance Exam. Their performances in the exams not only decides their future education but also affect the evaluation for my performance as a teacher (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

As Dingmei said, the examinations not only decide the students' future, but also affect the teachers'. Often, students' scores in these examinations are used as the measurement for teachers' performances. Consequently, they affect the teachers' promotions, prizes and bonuses and living quarters from their working institutions. The teachers in middle schools and elementary schools felt most strongly about this.

> To be honest, I as a teacher have only one goal, that is, to help student get high scores in the Entrance Exam. This exam is now the only measurement of teacher's performance and competence....Students' scores in the exam are the only measurement for a teacher's promotion, bonus, living space and prizes. If I can not help my students get good score in the exams, their parents will be very unhappy with me (Chenli, 09-01-97).

> In our schools, students' scores in the exams are used as the only measurement to evaluate a teacher. If one's students' average score is two points less than that of the students in the same grade taught by another teacher, she will definitely have a hard time with her colleagues and principals in the school. Besides, she will also have problems with her students' parents (Meili, 08-01-97).

At the tertiary level, this does not seem to be as much an issue as in secondary schools. However, teachers still feel very much constrained by the exams.

> Examination results are used as one of the important criteria for teachers' evaluation. Teachers care about the exam scores just as much as the students themselves. So teachers will not take a new method that they are not familiar with without careful consideration. Thus for CLT to be applied in China will take up a lot of courage from the teacher and support from their colleagues and authorities (Fanke, 21-01-97).

To Yanbo, the grammar-based examination system also helps to maintain a vicious cycle which is destructive to using CLT in China. When students begin to learn English in elementary schools, they focus on grammar, neglecting training in listening and speaking. When they later come to junior middle schools, they again work much more on grammar than on English listening and speaking. It is very difficult to use CLT with them because they do not have a good preparation in speaking and listening. This goes on to the university, including teachers' university. There, future English teachers are better trained in English grammar than their communicative abilities. So when they finally become teachers, they teach according to how they have learned the language and teach what they are good at – grammar and reading.

> Besides, students do not put enough emphasis on English listening, particularly oral English proficiency. They learn English only to pass the exams. So they do not have a firm foundation in English listening and speaking....For instance, if listening and speaking abilities are completely ignored in junior middle schools, it is not possible to ask them for good listening and speaking proficiency when they are in senior middle schools. I don't think it possible to expect them to have a good

> listening and speaking skills at university. All these factors have been constraints for using the Communicative Approach (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Insufficient funding. The respondents mentioned insufficient funding as a constraint. To use CLT in teaching English, certain equipment and facilities must be in place, for instance, TV sets, photocopiers, etc. However, many Chinese elementary and secondary schools can not afford such equipment. In many universities, there may be such equipment but teachers have limited access to it.

> The school supports me in getting most needed teaching materials, such as textbooks. However, it can not afford the expensive equipment. For instance, we don't have a Xerox machine. There were a few times I needed to make some photocopies for my students. I had to ask my students' parents to copy them with the machines in their work place (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Yanbo also expressed his frustration.

> We cannot really use CLT. First of all, we do not even have the necessary audio-oral facilities. My cassette player is not working properly. I am not complaining about the school, because it does not have the money for this. So to teach in China is difficult, especially if you want to keep up with the West (Yanbo, 13-01-97).

Extra funding is also needed to obtain resource books and materials needed for communicative activities. When the fund is not there, it is hard to use the Communicative Approach.

> I would like to teach my students some speaking. I need some good teaching materials for them. But it is difficult to buy them in China. I once met an American who came to study Chinese in China. He showed me some really fabulous materials he brought over from the U.S. I really liked them, but to buy them is too expensive for us (Meili, 22-01-97).

Difficulties on the Part of CLT itself

The respondents reported two major problems they found with communicative language teaching itself which had made it difficult for them to use it. The problems were: CLT proponents' not having taken into account the characteristics of TEFL and CLT's lack of effective and efficient assessment instrument.

CLT proponents' not having taken into account the characteristics of TEFL. All the respondents cited the fact that CLT proponents' not having taken into account the characteristics of TEFL as a constraint. To the Chinese teachers, there are distinctive differences between English as a *foreign* language and English as a *second* language. They disliked the fact that English as a foreign language has rarely been differentiated from English as a second language in the research community, especially, among many Western language education researchers.

> I find EFL and ESL are very different from each other. But very often people do not see their differences. This is more serious a problem in the Western research community. They do not differentiate EFL and ESL when they discuss language learning and teaching problems. I think many of them must have made the assumption that they are not that different, which is very wrong. They are absolutely not the same. They are very different. And because they are different, we often run into problems that have not been addressed in research (Haigang, 10-02-97).

The major differences that Chinese teachers saw between EFL and ESL included those in learning environments, learners' purposes of learning English, teachers' English proficiency, and the availability of authentic English materials.

The respondents really emphasized the learning environment as the major difference between ESL and EFL. This issue came up in interviews with all the

six interviewees and was brought up more than once in each interview. To them, ESL learners have a much more favorable learning environment because they can be exposed to constant input in and outside the English class and they feel the need to communicate in English. On the contrary, EFL learners have a much less propitious environment. They can only hear English in the English class and they do not feel the need to communicate in English, not even in the English classroom, since they share the same first language.

> The major difference is the learning environment. In ESL situation, learners can feel the invisible pressure to use the language and also have the constant comprehensible input in their daily lives, not limited to classroom teaching only (Meili, 22-01-97).

> .... For English as a foreign language, like that in China, they are learning it only in the classroom. They do not have much time except only a few hours to spend on English every week. They do not have constant input as ESL learners do. Their parents do not speak English and they do not hear any English except in English classes. There is no communicative need for them. Even in English class they speak in Chinese (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

Interestingly, the teachers regard the difference in learning environments as their justification for teaching Chinese students grammar. In English as a second language, it is possible not to teach the learners grammar and they can learn the language. But this is not possible in English as a foreign language situations.

> I believe even there are no exams for students, I think for Chinese students to learn English well, they need to learn English grammar.... After all, they do not have a helpful language learning environment. They need to have something like grammar to hang on to for constant after-class review, so that they won't return to the teacher everything they have learned in class (Yanbo, 11-01-97).

> We are learning and teaching English in China. English is taught as a foreign language, which is very different from ESL, especially in terms of the learning environment. I think it is very difficult for students to learn English if we do not teach them any structure. They need and actually

> they like to have something to hang on to so that they can review them after class. As you know, in China, students are expected to spend a lot of time to digest what they have learned in class. If we do not teach them any patterns, they have nothing to review (Chenli, 09-01-97).

Another major difference the Chinese teachers saw was the difference in the learners' purposes of learning English. In China, students learn English first to pass examinations. Then they learn English in order to read and translate technical documents in English. There are people who expect to use English to communicate with English speakers in their future careers but they do not have a strong need to communicate orally. In English as a second language situations, the learners, who are mainly immigrants from other countries, learn English in order to live in the English-speaking country. They actually have a much greater need to develop their listening and speaking abilities, rather than reading and writing abilities.

> Our students learn English to pass exams. Most of them expect to be able to read some technical writing in English and if possible translate them into Chinese. Few of them think of conversing in English. ESL students in Canada, I believe, have a different expectation for using English. They want to use English to find jobs, to get by in their daily lives. They need to speak (Fanke, 21-01-97).

The third major difference referred to by the respondents was in the constitution of English teachers and their competence in English. In English as a second language situations, the teachers are mostly native English speakers. They are fluent in English but probably won't be able to explain the English grammar well. In China, the majority of the teachers are Chinese nationals and their greatest disadvantage is their difficulty in speaking English. Their advantage is that they have a good knowledge of the English grammar and can explain it to their students.

> In China, the teachers of English are Chinese who have learned English in China and our spoken English is poor. We do not have a good

> knowledge of the English culture. In ESL countries, the teachers are fluent in speaking English because they are native English speakers. But they are not good at English grammar and they may find it hard to explain to their students about grammar. I guess that might be one of the reasons why CLT has been embraced in ESL countries (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Another major difference that the respondents saw was the availability of authentic English materials. In an ESL country, for example, the United States or Canada, there are plenty of authentic English materials that can be used in English classrooms in addition to those specially-prepared ESL materials. But in China except English textbooks and some classic English novels, it is very difficult to find materials written in English that can be easily brought to use in the English classrooms.

> In ESL situations, there are many English materials of different levels that they can use in English classes. But in China, I have difficulty finding English materials except textbooks. I have an Australian friend and she has been sending me some used materials and I sometimes use them with my students. They like them a lot (Chenli, 17-02-97).

To the Chinese teachers, because CLT has been established and popularized in English as a second language situations, some of the important characteristics of the English as a foreign language situation have not been taken into consideration. As a result, CLT is potentially problematic for introduction into the EFL contexts.

<u>CLT's lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments.</u> The respondents referred to CLT's lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments as a barrier for them to try CLT. First of all, used to traditional discrete-point testing of grammatical knowledge, teachers found it disconcerting that there were no prescribed, ready-made assessment tools for communicative competence and they would have to design their own. They did not feel they had time or expertise in designing such exams. Secondly, they were discouraged by those practical

difficulties. For them, the best way to test students' communicative competence is to give the students oral tests. But because each teacher teaches quite a few classes at the same time. There are normally over 50 students in each class. They can not afford so much time to do oral tests with so many students.

> I once tried oral tests for my students. But that involved too much work, much more than what I had expected. Besides, there were many practical difficulties. For instance I had to finish the test before a certain day because it was part of the students' final exams. I was teaching two classes of close to sixty students in each. Soon after I started the test, I realized that there was no way that I could do this. I soon concluded it was impossible and gave it up. I have never tried it again since then and I have no intention to try it again under the present conditions (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

> In China, there are many students learning English. But there are not that many teachers available. The demand is way larger than the supply. In such a situation, it is very difficult to test students' oral competence by running oral tests (Haigang, 10-02-97).

Also the teachers generally would not accept these subjective tests. They were worried about maintaining a comparable criteria when giving students oral tests.

> ....Besides, there is the difficulty in applying the same criteria all the time among the teachers (Dingmei, 20-01-97).

> Even if that's possible, how to work out a comparable criteria for teachers in other schools (Yanbo, 15-02-97).

Finally, the teachers' own inability to communicate well in English is again a discouraging factor here. Because they do not speak English well, they felt reluctant to do oral tests for students.

> To be frank, I don't like doing oral tests. As you know, I cannot express myself freely. I found it frustrating not being able to say what I want to say when doing oral tests with students. I had been in oral tests several

times. I found I did not enjoy them. In my class, if I can avoid it, I won't hold oral tests (Fanke, 21-01-97).

Uncertainty in Overcoming the Difficulties

The respondents believed that to overcome the difficulties was an extremely arduous and complex issue. When I asked the question "Do you think these problems can be overcome?", the respondents revealed there was no straightforward answer. Two said,

> Oh, that's going to be very difficult. It's really difficult to say (Dingmei, 28-02-97).

> I have never really thought about it. But I would say that is going to be extremely difficult. It is very complicated (Chenli, 24-02-97).

To the respondents, to solve one problem may depend upon solving other problems and at the same time also lead to new problems to which there are no straightforward answers either.

> .... For instance, it might be possible to solve the problem of teachers' communicative competence. One of the ways to do it would be setting up some retraining programs for teachers. So it is with the problem of teachers' knowledge of CLT. Many short-term programs can be set up to retrain practicing teachers in CLT. But then we run into new problems: Where will the funding come from? If we get these teachers into retraining programs, who take their places during their retraining. How long will it take for them to improve their oral English well enough to be comfortable in using CLT in their classrooms (Haigang, 25-02-97).

The respondents also revealed that they were powerless in solving these problems. They held that their duty as teachers was to do what they were told to do. To decide what to change and how to change it was the business of the policy makers of the country.

> That's something authorities should consider. I am not in the position to think of those questions (Chenli, 24-02-97).

> That's not something I can solve. I do not have the power to do that (Meili, 22-01-97).

> However, this is not something I can do as a director of the English Section, let alone average teachers... (Haigang, 25-02-97).

However, the respondents did suggest that reform in the examination system and the nature of the examinations should be the place to start. To them, Chinese teachers follow the examinations very well. Any changes in the examinations will bring about corresponding changes in the classrooms.

> .... The first thing is to change the examination system and the nature of the examinations. This change will trigger changes in classroom teaching (Yanbo, 01-03-97).

> .... If you insist, I would say some changes in the examinations are very important. We teachers always follow them (Dingmei, 28-02-97).

Haigang believed that the government should make all possible efforts to improve the teaching and living conditions of the teachers. He held that English teaching will improve a lot when teachers become committed to their students and their teaching.

> In my mind, to make teaching an attractive profession is very important to the development of English teaching and Chinese education in general. Maybe it is the most critical issue in Chinese education at present. Now in China it seems nobody wants to be a teacher if he has a choice. Even practicing teachers are seeking for chances to leave the profession. For many teachers, teaching is just something they do to make a living. There is little commitment in them. So even if we are able to use CLT here in our classrooms, I doubt Chinese English teaching will improve much. Contrarily, if teachers are motivated when their living and teaching conditions are improved, TEFL in China will become much better even if we do not use CLT (Haigang, 25-02-97).

Four Questions Revisited

Four questions were used as the guide for this study. Now it is time to go back to the four questions and see how they have been answered.

What Problems Are Inherent in English Teaching in China?

China has had a long history of English teaching. Under very limited resources and disadvantageous conditions, China has made great achievements over the years. The best manifestation is the large number of people who have graduated from Chinese universities and secondary schools and are now working with English to some extent. Also, for so many years, China has relied upon its home-trained English-speaking personnel for service in the fields of politics, economy, culture and foreign trade. The achievements that China has made in English teaching are well worth celebrating.

However, there are problems in Chinese English teaching. The greatest problem identified in the study is the poor communicative abilities of the English learners in China. In China, the grammar-translation method is still common at all three educational levels while many teachers use a combination of grammar-translation method and one or several other methods such as the direct method, audiolingual method and CLT that some teachers claim to be using as well. Under such a method or methods, students study a lot of grammar and vocabulary. Reading and writing are generally emphasized more than listening and speaking. Students do not get many opportunities to practice using the language, particularly listening and speaking skills. Consequently, many students are 'deaf (*long*)' and 'mute (*ya*)' in English after a few or even many years of learning the language.

Under such methods, teachers and students mainly deal with grammar in reading classes. The texts are used to learn grammar rules and vocabulary while reading for meaning is unheeded. As a result, many of the students are not as good at reading and writing in English as they claim to be.

A related problem in Chinese English teaching is that the grammar-based English examination has a huge impact upon English teaching in the formal system. First, the examination system is very widely used in China and it is used to decide the futures of many ordinary Chinese people, including students. Therefore examinations of all sorts have been putting a lot of stress upon Chinese people. Among others, the examinations for students are the most important in China, receive the most attention and accordingly have been laying huge stress upon all involved parties: students, parents, teachers, and schools. Students rely on them to decide whether they can continue their education. Teachers rely upon them to get good evaluation about their performances and hence benefits decided by their performances. So, in schools and universities, everything is decided by examinations and everything is done for examinations.

What is worse about English teaching is that the examinations are generally grammar-based despite some recent changes. This makes both teachers and students spend much of the classroom time on grammar rather than developing students' communicative competence although they are aware that more speaking and listening training for the students will be more useful to the students and the country.

A third major problem with Chinese English teaching is that knowledge of English culture is often not given due attention in English classes, either because teachers are not aware that culture should be part of language teaching, or because the related knowledge is not readily accessible since it is

not provided in the textbooks or teachers' manuals, or because the teachers do not have easy access to related references. Consequently, many Chinese students and teachers are particularly underdeveloped in the knowledge of the English culture. In turn, that affects their sociolinguistic ability in English and lowers their communicative competence. Lack of understanding of English culture can also affect their reading ability.

A fourth and closely related problem with Chinese English teaching is the textbooks. First, in many schools the old textbooks are still used. These textbooks were written with grammar as the outline. To the teachers, they are nothing but an elaborated English grammar book. New textbooks have been published and are being used in some schools. However, teachers criticize them for being still too grammar-based, too loose in structure and with few activities for practicing the language. The textbook issue is particularly a problem with elementary schools. A majority of the provinces in China do not have textbooks for elementary schools. Instead, they use the textbooks for junior middle school students, the result being that the language is too difficult for elementary students and the content is unrelated to their lives.

The last major problem reported by the respondents was the poor treatment of teachers in general in China. Teachers, together with other intellectuals of the country, generally do not make as much as factory or company workers. Many teachers have to work at a second job to make money to help with their family expenses. This takes away teachers' time and energy from their primary duties. Also, Chinese teachers depend upon their working institutions for living quarters. But due to insufficient funding from the government, many schools have not been able to provide decent living space for teachers. This disheartens teachers, discouraging them from pursuing better teaching.

The respondents had a strong sense that these problems must receive immediate attention, especially in a time when there is an ever-increasing demand for competent English-speaking personnel in the country as the result of more economic and diplomatic exchanges set up with other parts of the world.

The major suggestions these teachers offered for possible changes include: students at all levels should make English listening and speaking a priority when learning English; cultural knowledge should become an important part of the English class; the class structure should be changed from teacher-centered to student-centered with more opportunities for students to practice using the language; the traditional four skills of language should be integrated into one course of English rather than separate courses for these individual skills; curricular changes should also be made to include courses more related to students' future careers.

What Can Communicative Language Teaching Contribute to English Teaching in China?

The respondents held that teaching methodology is the most important factor in English teaching. A proper methodology will bring about satisfactory outcomes. To them, many of the problems in Chinese English teaching today are the results of using inappropriate teaching methods. CLT, as the most recent approach in second language methodology, can help to address some of the problems in English teaching in China.

The teachers were convinced that the notion that language is for communication and can only be learned through communication can help Chinese teachers reconceptualize their understanding of English learning and teaching. With a proper understanding, changes will be made in English

classrooms. For instance, more opportunities should be provided for students to use the language. More emphasis should be laid upon the development of students' communicative competence; meaning rather than grammar points should be the focus of instruction. Although many current researchers advocate a focus on form through task-based communicative activities, it is understandable that these teachers wanted to emphasize meaning as the focus of instruction, considering that it has long been overlooked in English teaching in China and has thus resulted in serious problems in learners' English competence. Of course, the Chinese teachers should be cautious not to go to the other extreme, that is, stressing meaning and overlooking form of the language.

How Feasible Is Communicative Language Teaching in China?

The respondents were positive about introducing CLT in China. Yet there were discrepancies among them as to how much CLT should be introduced. Dingmei believed that Chinese English Teaching can benefit from CLT in terms of reconceptualizing about language learning and teaching. But to transplant CLT into China is unwise and impossible. Haigang showed more enthusiasm about using CLT in China and thought that it will work in China in spite of difficulties. Yanbo held that CLT is useful to China, but at present it can only be experimented in key schools where conditions are more favorable.

What Are the Difficulties That Chinese English Teachers Have Had and Might Have Had in Their Attempts to Use CLT? Can These Difficulties Be Overcome? If Yes, How, and to What Extent?

While the respondents firmly believed that CLT had much to offer to English teaching in China, they felt that there were many difficulties and constraints that

hindered their attempts to completely adopt CLT into China. The difficulties fell into four categories: difficulties on the part of the teacher, difficulties on the part of the students, difficulties on the part of the educational system and the difficulties on the part of CLT itself.

First, many teachers in China are not fluent speaking English and thus find it hard to lead class activities in English. Also, many teachers do not have a good sociolinguistic and strategic competence in English. They are afraid of losing face when they are unable to answer students' questions related to the sociolinguistic aspects of English. Worse of all, a majority of Chinese teachers have not had good training in CLT and have only a sketchy understanding of it. As a result, many teachers hold misconceptions about CLT. They would not use it because their misunderstandings about CLT go against their own philosophy about language teaching in China. Their lack of time and expertise in communicative material development also discourages them from attempting CLT. To make matters worse, they are not going to have many opportunities for retraining in CLT either because they simply can not find retraining opportunities or they can not find good programs. Last of all, they also find it discouraging that they can not get the support they need from CLT experts, school authorities or even fellow teachers.

Students' low proficiency in English is also considered a constraint for teachers to use CLT. Their mastery of English structures and vocabularies is so limited that teachers find it hard to get across to them what they are expected to do and they would also have difficulty in communicating among themselves in English. Students' preference for grammar in class instruction to succeed in the grammar-based examinations that they have to take also inhibits teachers from using CLT. The most discouraging factor for the teacher is students' general resistance to class participation. They are more used to being inactive and waiting to be told in class.

Large class size is another big challenge for teachers who want to try CLT. With generally over fifty students crammed into one classroom, teachers find it difficult to give the students individualized attention and effectively monitor students. Grammar-based examinations actually draw English grammar to the attention of all the involved parties: students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. This basically makes it impossible to use CLT in Chinese schools. Insufficient funding for facilities needed for CLT is another depressing factor for teachers who attempt to use CLT.

To the respondents, even CLT itself contributes to the constraints for them trying CLT in China. The difficulty from CLT is mainly twofold. CLT has been developed with ESL as the model means that adjustments must be made if it is to be adapted to EFL situations. This has not taken place successfully in formal school-based situations. The other reason is that it does not provide quick and economical means of measurement of students' communicative competence. In China where each teacher teaches several large classes, giving students oral English tests for their communicative competence is impossible.

What will they do in light of these difficulties? The respondents generally had not thought much about such a question or they just did not have much to say in the matter. They felt that they were not in a position to consider such policy issues. Besides, they felt that these difficulties and constraints they reported in using CLT in China were intertwined. To overcome them would be very complex and difficult.

They did make the suggestion that efforts could start in making teaching an attractive profession by elevating teachers' economical and political status in China. Once this is solved, China will have much more favorable conditions for

improving English teaching. The two immediate outcomes will be better candidates for future teachers and teachers' greater motivation to do a good job. Another place to start could be efforts to improve the examination system and the nature of the English exams so that it will exert a positive influence upon classroom instruction.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an overview of the six participants of the study was first provided. Then the six themes that emerged from this study were presented, followed by a summary of the findings with the four research questions as the outline.

The following chapter contains the discussion of the research findings and implications of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are two sections in this chapter. The first section is a discussion of the findings of the study. This is then followed in the second section by a discussion of the implications of the study.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Insignificant Differences in the Teachers' Responses

The participants of the study are six Chinese teachers of English at three different educational levels. They are teaching different grades in different educational institutions. However, it seems that their responses about Chinese English teaching did not vary as much as I had assumed.

On the whole, all the six respondents seemed to have very similar feelings about the difficulties they were confronted with in using CLT in their classrooms. The differences in their responses are not really important. The first that was noticed in the study is in the teachers' perspectives about their ability to conduct classes in English. All except Haigang felt that they are especially deficient in oral English; Haigang felt much more confident. He did not think it would be difficult for him to teach in English and in fact he had already been doing so. Interestingly, Meili and Dingmei, the two English teachers from the elementary schools, did not think that they should have many problems in teaching in English as far as they were concerned, but for a different reason. While admitting that they were poor at spoken English, they saw few problems in conducting classes in English, because, first, they both believed that English in elementary schools is very simple. Their students do not really learn a lot of English, and they do not really know a lot or stray from the textbook. They did not think that teaching English in elementary schools

demands that a teacher have strong oral skills. The two teachers from the secondary schools felt most strongly about their incompetence to teach in English. Because their students receive such a wide range of information every day, it is really difficult for the teacher to predict what they may come up with in class discussion. It must be pointed out that it is true that the teachers' deficiency in oral English has been an important factor discouraging them from using English only in class. However, another equally important factor is the society's general high pressure for teachers to know all and to be ever-correct. Any mistake or failure to answer a question will make the teacher lose face in front of the students. Therefore, such a fear of the unknown for the teacher has also been very discouraging for the teacher speaking English only in class.

Another difference is in their perspectives on students' interest in learning spoken English as opposed to grammar. While the other teachers felt that their students would display no interest in English speaking, Haigang found his students interested in grammar, reading, writing as well as English speaking and listening. The students he taught were university students who specialized in English. They have the time, motivation and energy to spend on oral English. Besides, there are required speaking courses for them and they have to pass oral examinations to get their degrees. They are also attracted by the possibility of getting well-paid jobs in foreign or Sino-foreign companies where oral English is a requisite. Haigang also felt that his students have reached a pretty good level in English when they enter university since they normally achieve high scores in the exams. So the problem of students' being unable to follow him when he speaks English only in class is out of the question despite the initial difficulty that many of his students may experience due to lack of training in listening and speaking prior to university.

The third difference is in the size of the class. While the other teachers reported that they have as many as 60 or more students in one class, Haigang, teaching

students majoring in English at the university, was enjoying classes of around 30 students in each.

Since Haigang had these advantages, he was able to use more CLT with his students, or to be exact, he incorporated more of the communicative component into his classes compared with the other teachers. However, he was still of the opinion that the challenges he was facing were huge. Like other teachers, he stressed that there were too many challenges that he would need to surpass. The advantages that he had were not great enough to offset the other difficulties and were actually insignificant compared with the difficulties that he was facing.

So the differences in responses mainly occurred between Haigang and the other five respondents. This seems to suggest that university English major students in English departments are a special group of English learners in China. Such departments are staffed by people who are generally more competent in English and have better research qualifications. Students in these departments are better prepared in English when they enter the university. It seems that the English department is what one of the respondents referred to as the institutions where there are better conditions for CLT to take effect. That is probably why Haigang was able to incorporate more of a communicative component into his teaching than other respondents in the study.

No major difference has been found between the responses of the secondary school teachers and those of the elementary school teachers. They share all the concerns and the difficulties that they are having in teaching English in China and particularly in their attempts to introduce CLT into China. Also, no major difference has been noted between the responses of the junior middle school teacher and the senior middle school teacher. Other than those

discussed above, no major differences were noticed between the responses of Fanke, who teaches university engineering students, and Haigang, who teaches university English major students. There is no major difference between the responses of the male and female English teachers except that the female teachers seem to feel that they have more family duties to perform in addition to their duties as teachers, which makes them feel more short of time for other things such as devising communicative activities and writing communicative materials. In sum, the Chinese teachers were fairly consistent in their understanding of TEFL in China and their difficulties in using CLT in their classrooms.

Overwhelming Difficulties in Number and Range

The teachers in the study were quick to report their own constraints in implementing CLT. The difficulties mentioned generally fall under the category of difficulties on the part of the teacher. In the interviews, the respondents really stressed difficulties caused by themselves. They would fully explore constraints resulting from their own deficiency in English and CLT before looking into other sources for constraints. This seems logical considering that the teachers were from a culture in which self-criticism and modesty are considered personal virtues and there is high societal expectation for teachers to know all and be error-free authorities.

The number of the difficulties and the range of the problems that the teachers reported are overwhelming. They relate to almost all the major aspects of language teaching -- the teacher, the student, the educational system -- which directly affect the success of the introduction of CLT in China. The present Chinese TEFL situation, characterized by teachers' and students' low English proficiency; their preference for traditional learning and teaching styles; the unfavorable educational system; and lack of professional, administrative and

collegial support for teachers, seems to run counter to the conditions required for a successful implementation of CLT. These conditions include competent and confident teachers, active and risk-taking language learners, sufficient instruction time, conducive reinforcing learning environments, strong support system, and the like. It seems the essential infrastructure needed for a complete adoption of CLT is not ready and the necessary ideological preparation on the part of English teachers, students and other involved parties is yet to be made if CLT is to be fully adopted.

Some of the problems reported in the study may be relatively easy to solve if the Chinese government and other involved parties are committed to their solutions. Others, however, may defy any easy solutions. Take the testing of learners' communicative competence as an example. Communicative programs rely on open-ended items for meaning-making and language use. External objective tests seem arguably improbable to test learners' communicative competence. This has made people mainly depend on oral English tests for that purpose. But in the case of Chinese English teaching, the huge number of English learners make such a task unwieldy for administration, marking and reporting, thus basically rendering the implementation of CLT in China improbable.

As pointed out by several respondents, the difficulties reported in the study are closely related but also independent. Solving one problem will not automatically lead to the solution of another though it may be helpful to some extent. For example, after changes have been made in the English Section of the National Entrance Examinations for Higher Learning, the newly added Listening Comprehension replaced some grammar items. But unless effective and efficient means of assessing students' communicative competence are worked out, an essential qualitative change in the English Examination does not seem likely. In turn, the problem of classroom teaching being grammar-

dominated will not be altered to any significant degree. To bring about fundamental changes in English teaching takes time and efforts from all parts of the society. Thus it is understandable that Chinese English teachers have found it difficult to fully or extensively adopt the Communicative Approach in their classrooms. It is also unwise for anyone to expect a full-scale implementation of CLT in China soon.

Teachers' Limited Practice of CLT

The Chinese teachers were eager to identify with communicative language teaching. They did not want to appear conservative and out of fashion. Another more important reason was that they did see the potential of CLT in helping them with some of their concerns over the problems in Chinese English teaching. Unfortunately, most of them did not seem to have a really clear idea as to what CLT is and how it works. To them, CLT is first more listening and speaking and second more opportunities for students to practice English in class. Interestingly, they were aware of their limited and incomplete understanding of CLT but they did not seem to care very much; because whatever the exact definition of CLT is, the two main ideas they have about CLT are most helpful to them and can help them solve the biggest problem they saw in their teaching practices -- "deaf (*long*)" and "mute (*ya*)" English learners.

However, confined by the limited resources and other difficulties plus their sketchy understanding of CLT, they were not able to practise the method much in their teaching, especially not in its true sense. Their experiments with CLT had been set back with difficulties of all sorts and so they had fallen back upon the traditional methods that they were comfortable with. What they were doing was that they mainly relied upon the traditional methods meanwhile taking whatever in CLT they considered useful and possible and to integrate into their

teaching in an attempt to introduce some changes as seen fit. This has been done very much on an individual basis.

Small as the teachers' efforts with CLT may seem, they are of profound importance to Chinese English teaching, considering the fact that it has been dominated by the traditional methods for so many years. Based upon their own experience of teaching English in China and their understanding of the problems in Chinese English teaching, the teachers all felt a need for pedagogical changes. This is important to Chinese English teaching. In the past studies, Chinese English teachers have often been described as those who have little interest in English pedagogy and are reluctant for pedagogical changes. Yet this study indicates that today's English teachers are interested in English teaching methodology and desire changes in their teaching.

This change in teachers' attitude can be attributed mostly to China's open-door policy, Western influences and a series of political and economic changes in the country in recent years. Because of the series of political and economic reforms and Western influences, many Chinese teachers are more open to options and ideas. Compared with their predecessors or themselves in the past, they are also more critical of the problems in English learning and teaching. Another factor that has helped to bring changes to the teachers' attitudes is the change in Chinese learners' needs for English. The Sino-foreign joint ventures and exchange programs that have mushroomed in China as the result of the new open-door policy have to some extent changed the learner's' needs for learning English. They have created greater demands for their listening and speaking skills rather than only a good knowledge of the English grammar. This in turn makes the teachers aware of the importance and necessity of offering students more practice in using the language. Unfortunately, the teachers felt serious constraints in many areas in their attempts to affect some changes in their teaching, as discussed in the

previous chapter. These constraints have stopped them from using much CLT in their practice.

Also, the Chinese teachers would not believe that an immediate, extensive, full adoption of communicative language teaching is possible for China with the present conditions. Born and grown in the country, they know that the constraints they are facing would not be overcome overnight. What's more important, they would not believe that they as teachers can change the situation. To them, they are merely implementers of curricula and not in the position to initiate any serious pedagogical change. They would believe that the final driving force for pedagogical change has to come top-down from the government.

This is true considering that China has always been a very hierarchical society. Teachers who are close to the bottom of the hierarchy naturally have great difficulty implementing essential pedagogical changes though they see them necessary. Except few occasional, tentative, minor changes, they can rarely achieve any radical changes in pedagogy. This is probably best shown in this well-known Chinese saying about teachers' abilities to effect changes -- "Intellectuals' rebellion won't succeed even in ten years (*Xiu cai zhao fan, shi lian bu cheng*)". Therefore, despite the teachers' desire for changes and some organized efforts to introduce CLT into China in the mid 1980s through joint efforts of foreign and Chinese teacher educators, CLT has had limited use in China and the pedagogical changes in English teaching have been slow over these years.

Radical pedagogical changes have to be initiated by the government in order to be successful in China. Such a statement is underscored by the systematic changes, particularly the educational changes, in the past 15 years. The radical social, political and economical changes in China in the last 15 years are

remarkable. Some examples of such changes include: opening China to the outside world after being closed for decades; introduction of a market economy into the system of planned economy; the policy of "one country with two systems [socialism and capitalism]", unemployment, bankruptcy of companies and factories, term appointment for administrators, universities charging tuition fees from students, university graduates seeking employment as opposed to guaranteed employment from the government, etc.. For Chinese people, all these were once so unimaginable. Many of the ideas were once excuses for imprisonment and execution. But today they have been accepted by the Chinese people. What this shows us is that China can make fundamental changes and it can achieve what it wants once the government and its members take the initiation for change and are committed to it. The implication for English teaching is thus obvious. Although the teachers reported so many problems in using CLT in China that an extensive use CLT in the country seems impossible, it will be possible once the Chinese government really sees the necessity and is willing to pursue it.

Nevertheless, I must point out that the CLT that will finally be used in China will not be the same as the CLT embraced in the West today. First, CLT is developing all the time itself. As Celce-Murcia et al. (1997) point out, today's CLT has come to a turning point in its development and it is very different from when it was born in late 1960s. Second, CLT that will be used in China will have to be modified to fit into the Chinese context because there are things such as the learning environment will not change as the Chinese government wishes. Penner's (1995) call for "A Chinese Way" fits these teachers' views of incorporating English language use into Chinese cultural and educational expectations. Since examinations are central to public and individual importance in China, examinations and pedagogy must match in purpose and content for changes to occur. Or even China will have a new term for the method that it will adopt then. However, whatever the method will be called, it

will be different from the present Chinese traditional approach and will definitely share many of the premises CLT.

Difficulties Shared by Teachers of Other Cultures

However, a cross-cultural examination of introducing CLT into EFL situations reveals that Chinese teachers are not alone in their frustration. Instead, many of the constraints reported by the Chinese teachers are also experienced by EFL English teachers in other parts of the world in their efforts to apply CLT in their respective teaching contexts. For instance, Japanese students do not see the need to use English and thus show little interest in communicative competence as the goal of English learning (Sano, 1984). English teachers in Vietnam reported difficulties such as large class size, grammar-based examinations and students' few opportunities to hear or read authentic English (Ellis, 1994). Teachers in Hong Kong are reluctant to use CLT due to its great demand for pre-class preparation time (Chau and Chung, 1987). Outside Asia, teachers in Cuba identified difficulties such as teachers' low English proficiency, their traditional attitudes toward language teaching, difficulty in finding authentic English and redesigning a new evaluation system, and adapting textbooks to meet the needs of communicative classes (Valdes and Jhones, 1991).

Why have there been such difficulties for teachers in these countries? It is inappropriate to generalize the reasons since there are salient differences among these countries in terms of language, culture, society, politics and economy. However, a closer study of the case of China might be able to shed some light on the matter and thus enable us to gain a deeper insight into the issue.

Roots of the Constraints

Given the fact that China has an educational theory which is totally different from that under which communicative language teaching has been developed, it is not surprising that Chinese English teachers have experienced so many difficulties in their attempts to try CLT.

Egan (1983) made a distinction between an educational theory and a scientific theory, the most important difference being that an educational theory is laden with values, whereas a scientific theory is value-free. Scientific findings that are acceptable in the context of one educational theory may be difficult to be accepted within the context of another educational theory. (Sampson, 1984).

Communicative language teaching, having grown out of scientific findings of linguistics and second language acquisition, has been developed under the Western educational theory and hence has been found compatible with it. However, when it is introduced into the educational context of China, it naturally has to be judged under the different Chinese educational theory. That is actually when the potential conflicts arise. As the fundamental Chinese educational theory is so different from its Western counterpart (Table 1), the surfacing of so many serious constraints for the Chinese teachers in applying CLT is inevitable. The complexity of these differences is suggested in Table 1 as it pertains to Second Language Education.

	Chinese	Western
Knowledge and Learning	knowledge being in books knowledge to be transmitted learning being accumulation of knowledge	knowledge being constructed learning being construction of knowledge
Teacher's role	unquestioned authority know-all and ever-correct transmitter of knowledge	facilitator and resource person setting up learning conditions managing classroom activities
Student's Role	passive recipient of knowledge discouraged from speaking up respectful of teachers reliant upon teachers	active participant self-directed assuming partial responsibility for learning

Table 1 Differences between the Fundamental Chinese and Western Educational Theories of Second Language Learning

Different Views of Knowledge and Learning

To Chinese people, knowledge is found in books and in the teacher. It can be transmitted from the book to the reader or from one person to another. Learning is the process of acquiring such knowledge and teaching is the process of transmitting the knowledge. The teacher is to help disseminate the knowledge to the students from the book and his/her own accumulation. As a well-known Chinese definition of teacher goes, "the teacher is the one to pass on truths, teach skills and offer help to the students". It is believed that once the student has mastered and accumulated sufficient book knowledge he/she will automatically gain deeper understanding over time and thus be able to apply what he/she has accumulated and become creative in many ways.

Under such a view of knowledge, learning and teaching in general, Chinese people hold a similar view of language learning and teaching. English as one of the school subjects is regarded as a piece of knowledge just like math or physics are pieces of knowledge. Teachers can help pass it on to their students. Thus the essential characteristics of language learning are memorization, repetition, habit formation, and the quantitative accumulation of grammar rules and English vocabulary. The mastery of structural patterns and English words and phrases through memorization and repetition will eventually lead to understanding and creative use of the language. Because language is viewed as a piece of knowledge (an end in itself) rather than a skill (a means to an end) (Ting, 1987) and language learning is seen as mastery and accumulation of grammar, lexicon and rules, errors are viewed as inadequate study, inadequate memorization, or bad habits, hence discouraged. A text is not read for meaning but deciphered for extending the vocabulary lists to be learned by heart and for refining the mastery of grammar, supposedly the law of the language (Scovel, 1983).

Western theorists have mostly moved out of the Tylerian view of knowledge and truth. Knowledge is seen more as the products of the construction of the learner's own understanding of the world and what he/she is receiving from the book or teacher in class. Learning is viewed as a knowledge construction process rather than a knowledge receiving process. Knowledge is constructed through continuous interaction of all types of experience and learning rather than memorized from books. The teacher is to create environments for the construction and to facilitate the process.

Communicative language teaching has grown and become popular in the West. The Western understanding of knowledge and learning has inevitably been woven into its underpinning philosophy. In this context, CLT sees English as a skill for the purpose of communication rather than a piece of knowledge to

be stored in mind. English learning is viewed as a skill development process. Students learn English through using and experimenting with the language. Errors are allowed and seen as necessary in the learning process, as they are regarded as indicators of learners' language development.

Different Views of the Teachers' Role

One important characteristic in the Chinese value system is the tendency to worship authorities and elders. The teacher as the one who is seen to control knowledge, senior to the students, is the authority in the class. The teacher is supposed to know all and for that he/she must be able to answer students' *any* questions at any time without even looking up in the textbook or a reference. The teacher is also supposed to be ever-correct. If the teacher errs, he/she is assumed to be incompetent in knowledge or undutiful because of inadequate preparation. If such things happen a few times, he/she will soon lose the respect of his/her students.

The influences of such a general understanding of the teacher's role upon English teaching are everywhere. For example, in dealing with the relationship of English teaching and learning, the teacher's role in teaching is stressed while students' learning process and their roles in it are ignored. In selecting teaching methods, both teachers and students have preference for lectures by the teacher and are opposed to discussions in class. Teachers like to teach according to what they have prepared before class and are not used to changing their teaching plans as they teach according to what is happening in class with the students. Teachers like to ask students questions but do not like to be questioned, interrupted or challenged by their students. In organizing English teaching, preferred are the same authoritative English textbooks, the same English teaching method, the same English teaching syllabus, the same English examinations with the same answers. Besides, the obligation for

teachers to provide instant, specific and ever-correct answers has also made them tend to adhere to their books, focus on end products and underestimate the learning process.

Communicative language teaching holds a very different role for the teacher. Breen and Candlin believe teachers have important roles in the communicative classroom.

> The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; first, as an organizer of procedures and activities.... A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities (1980, p. 99).

Other roles assumed for a CLT teacher are needs analyst, counselor, and group process manager (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). In all these capacities, the teacher puts students' development in the focus of the English class and thus his/her primary role is to provide the conditions for this process, set it going, observe it, try to understand it, give guidance, help it along, analyze and evaluate it. This helper role implies a different set of skills than a knower role.

Different Views of the Student's Role

In China, the student is viewed as a passive receiver of knowledge. It is through the constant accumulation of knowledge from books and the teacher that the student will be filled with the knowledge that he/she needs and then one day can be applied. Therefore, in most Chinese English classrooms, only passive receiver behaviors are allowed for students. They are generally discouraged

from expressing ideas in class and prohibited from speaking until spoken to. The student's attitude toward the teacher is one of respect, obedience, and reliance. The student depends on the teacher in his/her study as the institutions and the teacher in China tend to assume responsibility for the learning that occurs.

The student has a very different role to play in a communicative English classroom from that found in more traditional English classroom. Breen and Candlin describe the learner's role within CLT in these terms:

> The role of learner as negotiator-between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning-emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way (1980, p. 110).

The student is seen as an active participant in English learning. He/she is a communicator, actively engaged in meaningful negotiation between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. The student interacts primarily with each other in many configurations rather than only with the teacher. He/she is expected to contribute as much as he gains and thereby learn English in an interdependent way. The student is encouraged to take responsibility for his/her own learning.

Different Views of Student-Teacher Relationship

The Chinese student-teacher relationship is very much influenced by the Chinese culture. Although Confucius advocated "students should not yield to teachers when they have the truth", he was later superseded by another influential Chinese educationist, Xunzi (340-245 B.C.), who insisted students' absolute conformity with their teachers. To him, "It is betrayal not to say what

your teachers have said; it is treason not to teach what your teachers have taught. People of betrayal and treason must not be accepted by wise kings. The imperial officials must not speak to them when they meet." From then on, students have been told to say only what their teachers have said. Today, in Chinese schools, it is still common that students are expected to do whatever their teachers tell them to. The Chinese student-teacher relation is characterized by the worship of teachers as the absolute authorities.

The characteristic in the Chinese value system of the tendency for blood ties and family ties in dealing with interpersonal relationships also had a remarkable influence upon the student-teacher relationship. In a Chinese family or an extended family, the relationship between the older and the younger generation is the most important relationship to express and extend the blood ties in a family. So, from ancient China, "fidelity" has been the basic moral rule for regulating the relationships in a family. The so-called "fidelity' and "loyalty" are actually the absolute respect and obedience of the younger to the older generation and that of the inferiors to their superiors.

Such a value orientation has influenced how teachers look at their students. For many Chinese teachers, obedience and submissiveness are signs of a good student. In evaluations of students' performances at schools, students are often praised for their simplicity and tolerance. On the contrary, those students who like to discuss their own opinions regarding learning subjects are often considered mischievous and uncultured. Some are even categorized as "bad students".

The student-teacher relationship within the context of communicative language teaching is very different from the Chinese one. The relationship is more informal. The teacher, as an organizer and facilitator of the classroom activities, is not expected to be the authority in the classroom. Instead, he/she is one of

the participants of the classroom interactions. Students are active in classroom participation and decision over the content of learning. They are encouraged to be creative in using the language to communicate and interact with their peers.

These radical differences between different educational theories directly explains the sources of some of the constraints reported by the Chinese teachers, for instance, the students' resistance to participate in class activities. For at least several years before they start to be in an English classroom in elementary or secondary schools, the students have been educated under the traditional Chinese educational theory and have lived in the culture. Being quiet in class, never challenging the teacher, and receiving whatever is given have been built in them gradually over those years as part of the school culture. If they are assigned new roles when they enter the English classrooms, they will unavoidably experience a "culture shock" at the best. Besides, because of the inconsistencies of different teachers' expectations of the students' roles, most of them will be so confused and unable to recover. Others may be able to survive the "culture shock". But because this may take them quite some time, it finally may wear out their English teachers so that they will give up their expectations of a new role from their students.

The differences in educational theories also indirectly explains the sources of most of the other constraints cited by the respondents. For example, teachers' deficiency in spoken English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence in English is a result of the educational theory, especially the language learning theory of the time when they were studying English at universities. Because they have been taught in the grammar-translation method, they have become very proficient in English grammar and reading. Their listening and speaking skills in English were neglected, and thus they have not had much time to communicate orally in English, which has led to their deficiency and lack of confidence in oral English. Since they have not experienced much authentic

English conversation, their low strategic and sociolinguistic competence should be anticipated.

Also, the large classes, the grammar-focused examinations, lack of support for teachers, few opportunities for teacher retraining are all by-products of the Chinese educational theory. The teacher's authoritarian role to transmit knowledge leads directly to teacher-centered, lecture-type class where the number of students can range from 10 to 60. Teachers' adherence to texts, the source of knowledge and wisdom, makes it possible to teach without inservice training and support of all kinds. The expectation for the teacher to be omnipotent and ever-correct has discouraged them from teaching English in a communicative way because they do not always speak "perfect" English though they might speak adequate English to teach a communicative class in China.

It is also worth mentioning that many of the problems the Chinese English teachers reported about English teaching in general also have their sources in the particular Chinese educational theories built upon the traditional Chinese culture.

First, Chinese people tend to deal with interpersonal relationships on the basis of the blood ties and family relations. This helps to explain why teachers do not have a high status in the society though they are very much respected by their students. As mentioned previously, Chinese students generally respect and even worship their teachers. But in China, people's respect for teachers is not unconditional. Influenced by the blood ties and class structure embedded in the so-called "fidelity" and "loyalty", Chinese students usually only respect their own teachers or, at most, teachers of their own schools. That is to say, they respect their teachers not that much because they are teachers but because they have taught them, for which they must be eternally grateful. As a consequence, Chinese teachers have very high status in front of their own

students and their students' parents but very low social status as a profession in the country.

Second, the country's excessive reliance upon the examinations for education and promotion and the general concern over all sorts of entrance examinations can find explanations in the traditional Chinese culture and the traditional educational thoughts derived from it.

In Chinese tradition, craving for fame, status and officialdom is popular even among ordinary Chinese people. Even today, Chinese children read a lot of stories and watch many films of how children of poor families overcame all sorts of difficulties and finally succeeded in the imperial examinations and secured officialdom, hence glorifying the family. In Chinese culture, a person's success is decided by the status he/she can finally reach in the hierarchy of officialdom.

Such a value orientation has affected peoples' values for education. For instance, in China, people judge the quality of teaching of a certain school solely on the basis of the number of its graduates who later become officials, celebrities or technological giants. Naturally, the criteria used for selecting officials then become the criteria for the quality of education. In that sense the National Entrance Examinations system, modeled after the imperial examination system, is actually a product of such a value orientation. As a result, teachers, schools, students, and parents all care only about the examinations. While stress is placed upon students' accumulation of knowledge, other abilities are overlooked, including development of students' knowledge acquiring abilities, problem-solving abilities and creativity are overlooked. Students' cognitive development is emphasized over their metacognitive developments, such as students' interests, emotions, and personalities.

The particular Chinese way of thinking tends to stress the gestalt while ignoring the logical analysis of an issue. So, Chinese educational thoughts were well developed in their early history, but lag behind current Western complexity of educational thought. But such a characteristic in Chinese thinking has limited the breadth and depth of today's studies when education needs to be broken down into more sub-areas for analysis (Diao, 1995). In teaching, Chinese teachers emphasize the outcomes of their teaching while disregarding the scientific analysis of the contents, methods and procedures in reaching them. Consequently, teachers hold that a method is good as long as it enables them to teach students to obtain good scores in examinations.

Another characteristic of the Chinese way of thinking is Chinese peoples' preference for uniformity rather than difference. As a consequence, for many years, Chinese researchers "talk" but never "debate" despite of the many controversial issues in education in China. In teaching, teachers like to follow the general trend. They are unwilling to take risks so as to pursue their own beliefs of education and achieve the educational values which they believe are proper. Teachers are often heard saying "Other teachers are preparing their students for exams, can I not prepare mine?" School principals would say "Other principals are pressing for a higher rate of students enrolled into universities, can I not do that?" Influenced by such thoughts, students like to look for the same correct answer from the teacher or the book.

Besides, the Chinese people tend to stress the participation of emotions in thinking (Diao, 1995). Such a preference makes Chinese teachers and students apt to accept the irrational while neglecting the rational. For example, though many teachers are aware that the grammar-translation method does not really help students learn English, they still use it merely because it can help students get higher scores than otherwise in the examinations. These

teachers, then, have given preference to the emotional needs to succeed on the examinations over their knowledge of insufficient communicative ability in English. Also they will be more respected by their students, students' parents, colleagues and superiors. The Chinese teachers are aware of the "deaf" and "mute" problems in English teaching and they know that more practices with listening and speaking will help students gain better skills in them. But in classroom teaching, they put preparation for examinations before development of such communicative skills. As a result, students do not get many opportunities to practice listening and speaking in English classes.

In traditional Chinese philosophy, teamwork and collectivity are emphasized over individuality. Such an orientation has seriously suppressed people's creativity. Under the shackles of the Confucius "courtesy", people are prohibited to think about problems that are beyond their social status. That is the so-called "Gentlemen do not think beyond their status". Everybody should know his/her place, should perform the social role that is assigned to him/her but should never exceed it (Diao, 1995). This explains some of the teachers' reactions to my question asking for their opinions as to where Chinese TEFL should be going and whether English should be taught to all children in all schools. As teachers, they believe, they should not think about things that are beyond their duties. To them, teachers are the implementers of the curriculum which has been developed and decided by research experts and government officials. They are not supposed to poke their noses into the issues in question.

Implications of the Study

What implications does this study hold for English teaching in China? This issue will be looked at from the following five aspects:

1. implications for policy-making
2. implications for teaching methodology in China
3. implications for teacher education in China
4. implications for expatriate teachers in China
5. implications for research in China and outside China

Implications for Policy-Making

As seen in the study, CLT has had great difficulty in entering the Chinese English teaching classrooms for a variety of reasons. One of the major reasons is that teachers do not have the time and energy to devise new communicative materials for students or to do a good job of teaching because they have to worry about making money and obtaining living quarters for their families. Therefore, the first implication of the study is that China must overcome whatever difficulties to improve teachers' treatment in the country.

It is true that since 1978 there has been a significant increase in teachers' salaries and noticeable improvement in their living conditions. However, every increase in teachers' salaries has been accompanied by a similar increase in the salaries of other workers of the country, due to pressure from those groups. As a result, despite the fact that teachers' salaries have gone up, "teachers are still among the lowest paid professionals in China" (Hu and Seifman 1987, p. 43). According to data of 1991 provided by the Chinese Statistics Bureau, the annual income for teachers was an average *yuan* 2,186 per teacher, which was 9.8 percent lower than the salaries for workers involved in the industrial sector, 17.6 percent lower than the salaries for workers in the architectural trade, 15.04 percent lower than those for workers in the scientific and technological sectors.

Besides, "while respect for the teacher has led to some improvement in salaries, it has so far been impossible to do much for their terribly cramped and overcrowded living conditions" (Price 1988, p. 104). It is very common for a married couple who are both teachers to share a one-bedroom apartment, provided by the institution where they work, with a child in his/her teens. A young married couple who are both teachers often have to live separately in their respective dorms which each shares with two or more young teachers. They will not be provided proper accommodation so that they can live together until four or five years after their marriage. On the contrary, the living conditions of other groups of workers have improved much faster and in greater degree.

Such a phenomenon "of mental workers being rewarded less than physical laborers" has existed in China for the past three decades and it has had severe impact on education and teachers in China. It first of all seriously dampened inservice teachers' enthusiasm for teaching. Many teachers abandoned the profession and a lot more are seeking opportunities to leave, which only exacerbates the problem of a shortage of English teachers. Those who are not hopeful in changing to other jobs find no motivation to do a good job in teaching. Because of low salaries and high inflation, many teachers are working at second or third jobs in order to make enough money to cover the discrepancy between their salaries and family expenses. This has resulted in a decline in performance at their posts. Besides, as the country moves further along the line of a market economy and people become more materialistic in their value orientation, it is inevitable that teachers and the poorly-paid profession will receive less respect from the public. This problem is more serious in areas which are economically more developed.

In addition, this phenomenon has also had tremendous negative effect on pre-service teacher education. "... most talented youth show little interest in teaching and the spiraling inflation rate has undermined teacher morale"

(Hauser, Fawson and Latham 1985, p. 44). Normal institutions are having difficulties in enrolling quality students and ensuring their graduates assume their assigned teaching positions.

The betterment of teachers' treatment should also include teachers' social status. In the last century, teachers in China have been championed, suspected and reviled at different times (Paine, 1992). China has been known for its traditional respect for teachers. In old China, teachers (usually tutors) were those who had succeeded in the most rigid and strict examinations administered by the king and other officials. They might not be very successful financially, but they definitely had the greatest respect from the public. "Become teachers, so you can become elders; become elders, so you can become kings" was a popular maxim (Tan, Zhuang and Wendel 1985). After the founding of the Republic of China in 1949, leaders of the Communist Party of China renewed the emphasis on teacher education by declaring it equal to industrial development. Teacher education developed rapidly. Teachers were hailed as "glorious engineers cultivating human souls". When the Cultural Revolution started in 1967, "deliberate attempts were made to downgrade the status of intellectual education itself" (Sloss, 1981, p. 157). A slogan at that time was, "The more knowledge (a person has), the more reactionary he is likely to be." Accordingly, teachers' status plummeted. Teachers became "stinking intellectuals" and often the "targets of proletariat dictatorship". Disheartening stories were often heard of teachers being persecuted to death. In 1977 when the "spring of science" finally arrived following the overthrow of the "Gang of Four", teachers were replaced on the seat of "hardworking gardeners" and "engineers of the human souls". Teaching became "the most glorious profession under the sun". Right after 1989 Tiananmen event, teachers as part of the country's intellectuals, were downplayed again. Fortunately, the government prioritized national stability and economic development over political struggle and gradually restored teachers' social

standing. The organization of the drafting of the first Chinese Teachers' Law in 1995 was an indication of this reversal of attitudes.

However, teachers, who have witnessed and experienced the fluctuations of teachers' status to protect themselves, are known to play safe and be content with things as they are. They eagerly embrace the motto "never for prize, but only for peace." The manifestation of this attitude is teachers' adherence to traditional methods of teaching, seldom risking any initiatives or innovations in English teaching. Without teachers' strong desire to change, there can be little development in TEFL in China. This uncertainty in the country's policies regarding teachers and the uncertainty it has created in teachers have seriously hindered the development of English teaching

To bring teachers' potential into full play, it is imperative that the government address this issue of teachers' treatment. It is at present the most vital and urgent issue in Chinese English teaching as many other issues finally all boil down to the social and economic status of teachers. Solution of this problem will lead to and facilitate the solution of other problems. The betterment of teachers' treatment is almost solely in the hands of the government. Therefore, in government's policy-making, improvement of teachers' treatment should be the very first on its agenda.

One must recognize that it is difficult to influence the government to do this and especially such a thing will not happen overnight. But it is not impossible. I am hopeful that China will soon be in the hands of intellectuals who will have been exposed to the Western ideas of education. They are the people who will truly see the importance of education and the necessity of improving teachers' treatment in China. Also, the economic development in the country promises a strong financial backup which is badly needed for such a move. However, we can not sit there and wait for the day to come. I believe, as researchers and

educators, we always need to voice our concerns based on the studies we conduct, to promote gradual changes towards a final betterment of teachers' social and financial status in the country.

Furthermore, China also needs to better plan its English teaching. In China, English is taught in all universities and secondary schools and most elementary schools. English is one of the official core subjects for students at all levels, and English is being taught on the largest scale in the world. However, there are not sufficient resources to meet the needs of such a huge program. As a result, students are put in large sized English classes; requirements are lowered to recruit more English teachers; instruction is confined to traditional large-group instruction where English grammar and reading are stressed while the more important communicative skills of English listening and speaking are overlooked. The consequence is that a large number of students have learned English at school but most of them can only read some English but cannot communicate effectively and efficiently with English speakers. As a matter of fact, for most of them, there is no such need. A great majority of Chinese students (including university graduates) will not get to use English in their future jobs or lives after they finish school. Most of them forget most of what they have learned at school after a few years.

So, China might reconsider its language teaching policies while keeping in mind the present situations of English teaching in China. While it is true that China is developing more relations with other countries of the world, the need for English-speaking personnel is increasing and it would certainly be wonderful if all Chinese students could learn English well in schools, yet China needs to base her wishes upon the reality of Chinese conditions. Is it really necessary to teach all its students English at all levels? Does China have the resources to provide a good education in English for the number of students? What should be done when the resources available now can not guarantee it?

It might be worth considering that China should reduce the number of its students learning English so that the limited resources can be best made use of for a smaller number of students. For instance, when the number of students are reduced, the size of the class can be reduced and there will be more funding for some costly facilities or English teaching. In this way, teachers will be better provided to teach students communicative competence. Also, for those students who really dislike English, can spend more of their time on other subjects in which they are really interested. As a matter of fact, in some provinces in China, such experiments has been introduced in English teaching and positive feedback has been heard. China might want to take a more serious and deeper look at the results of such experiments and look for alternatives for running English programs in China.

Another change that China has to make is probably the goal that it has set for the students in English learning. A study of the syllabuses for all students reveals that stress has been put on the development of students' reading, writing, and translation abilities while the development of students' listening and speaking abilities is less stressed. To help set right the TEFL in China, China must make listening and speaking skills as important, if not more, as reading and writing. In accordance, more efforts should be made to represent the change in all sorts of English tests. As the saying goes, the examination is the piper that calls the tune. "Perhaps the tide will turn when language testing has changed its forms" (Maley, 1984, p. 13). For that purpose, more research must be carried out as to how to test students' true listening and speaking abilities in the Chinese context. China, however, should be aware of the fact that in the short term, there might not be effective ways. One way that can be considered is that China should not rely solely on one summative examination or one set of summative examinations to select candidates for future education or other purposes, but formative examinations should be included. In this way,

students' competence in listening and speaking may be better represented in the mechanism to decide their futures.

Some studies (e.g., Xie and Derwing, 1996) indicate that the private and community-based institutions which have mushroomed in China in recent years may be able to provide some directions for future English teaching in China. It is believed that, unbounded by the systematic problems that public institutions are facing now, such EFL programs are creating changes outside the public system. For instance, "the primary instruction mode is teacher-centred, but specific linguistic structures have to a large extent been wedded with communicative goals" (p. 394). It is likely that such programs will probably be where the ultimate pressure for pedagogical changes in Chinese English teaching will emerge. While it might be still too soon to be certain of these claims, the newly-established EFL programs outside the public system certainly deserve our attention and further study.

Implications for Teaching Methodology in China

Teaching methodology is a major concern for Chinese teachers. What method should be used in Chinese English teaching then? Where should Chinese language teaching methodology be going? How much CLT should be used in Chinese English teaching?

It is evident from the study that teachers in China believe that explicit grammar instruction is needed in English teaching in China, although many teachers feel that China now is teaching too much grammar in English classes. The reasons given by the teachers to justify this proposition include: Chinese language is radically different from English in grammar, the way of thinking of the Chinese people is also different from that of the Westerners, Chinese students do not have a conducive English learning environment, Chinese

students do not have much time to spend on English each week, plus the fact that all the critical entrance examinations for students still mainly test students' knowledge of the English grammar rather than their communicative ability.

The literature also abounds with argument for inclusion of grammar instruction in second language teaching. Savignon (1991) argues, "while involvement in communicative events is seen as central to language development, thus involvement necessarily requires attention to form. Communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning" (p. 268). Schmidt (1991) argues that the notion of developing linguistic form by seeking situational meaning is not in accordance with the principles of cognitive psychology. According to him, the learners must pay attention to the learning objective and must then practice the objective so that it changes from part of a controlled process to part of an automatic process. Widdowson (1990) also argues that incidental, "natural" language acquisition is a "long and rather inefficient business" and that "the whole point of language pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery and can make arrangements for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in 'natural surroundings'" (p. 162). Others also argue that some attention to form is beneficial and even necessary to prevent early fossilization of undesired forms, even in children (Lightbrown, 1991; Lightbrown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1991b; Schachter, 1991; Van Baalen, 1983). Celce-Murcia et al. believe that "CLT has arrived at a turning point: Explicit, direct elements are gaining significance in teaching communicative abilities and skills" (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, 1997, p. 148).

Obviously, English grammar will remain an important part of English teaching in China and explicit instruction of English grammar will still be adopted by the

Chinese teachers for a long time to come. However, the teachers also feel that China is now teaching too much grammar to the students. Explicit grammar instruction is meant to help students learn the English language in order to use it; but many teachers and students, driven by the grammar-based examinations, care only about grammar while completely overlooking the use of the language in English learning. Consequently, the purposes of English learning are not fulfilled in most instances where students can not communicate with English speakers after spending quite a few years on English. So this situation must be changed, as suggested by the teachers.

CLT could be very powerful in helping address many of the problems inherent in English teaching in Chinese English teaching. However, because of the present situations of English teaching in China, teachers feel it is extremely difficult for them to completely adopt CLT in their practice. They have met with difficulties from all aspects of English teaching in China. Therefore, it is not advisable for China simply to jump onto the CLT bandwagon by mandating that CLT must be implemented in TEFL in China. Rather, China should carefully study their TEFL situation and then decide how CLT can best serve the needs and interests of the country. They could start by examining the achievements they have made so far in their EFL teaching in China and the factors that have brought about their successes, meanwhile weaknesses and problems inherent in EFL teaching should be examined to determine how CLT can best counteract them. As Taylor (1983) advocates, a communicative component could be gradually incorporated into traditional language teaching. Make sure that we "try out the new techniques without giving up useful older methods simply because they have been 'proved wrong'" (Swan, 1985, p. 87).

In the process of incorporating CLT into traditional language teaching, the extent of the incorporation depends on the specific EFL situations in different areas. It may be advisable to let those areas with relatively adequate ground for

CLT take the lead. Their experiences can then be summarized and shared with areas which are less developed in English teaching. In this way, some pitfalls can be avoided by the less developed areas in their efforts to move towards a more communicative approach in English teaching.

To negotiate a communicative component into the traditional methods, I would suggest a Structural-Situational-Communicative (SSC) (Cai and Jiang, 1994) model in order to make it manageable for teachers. This model is actually three steps that can be used in classroom teaching to deal with new materials. The first step is to present the new materials of the lesson. In it, the teacher isolates specific elements of knowledge or skill which compose communicative ability, and provides the learners with opportunities to practice them separately. The learners are thus being trained in the part-skills of communication rather than practicing the total skill to be acquired. The activities for this step include most of the learning activities to be found in textbooks and methodological handbooks, such as different types of drill or question-and-answer practice. These aim above all to provide learners with a fluent command of the linguistic system. Accordingly, the learners' main purpose is to produce language which is accurate and appropriate.

The ultimate goal of learning English is to be able to use it for communication purposes. Even if in the case of English learning in China, because students do not know what they will do until close to or even after graduation, there is no way to predict the students' needs for English, especially their need for English communicative abilities. Thus classroom instruction in China needs to set students' communicative abilities as its goal. The teachers in the study clearly saw this need and resounded their call for more listening and speaking in class for their students. Yet considering the particular students' learning styles, teachers' teaching styles and the unfavorable TEFL conditions in China, there will be great difficulty for teachers and students to jump from structural

presentation right to communicative use of the language. To bridge this gap so as to make the transition smooth, some of the ideas of the situational language teaching can be used, that is, after the presentation of the new materials of the lesson and the structures in it have been analyzed for students, the teacher can then organize the practice of these new patterns in different typical situations. Through repeated practice, students will be able to move from sheer memorization of the structures to the stage of using them in different situations. After ample practice, students can internalize the patterns and become more familiar with the typical discourse in a particular sort of situation. The aim is to strengthen students' fluent control over linguistic forms "so that the lower-level processes will be capable of unfolding automatically in response to higher-level decisions based on meanings" (Littlewood, 1981, p. 89). The first two steps will also take care of the students' and teachers' need for preparation for grammar-based examinations.

However, we must be aware that with situational dialogues students can only train their memorization and imitation. They know what to say when they come across exactly the same situations in the future, which in actuality seldom happens. Once they are confronted with new situations, they will have difficulty in communication. Therefore the teaching should move another step forward, towards the communicative aspect of teaching. When students have become very familiar with patterns and have become comfortable in using them in different situations, it is time that the teacher devise real communicative situations so that the students can use what they have learned in a real situation. Now the students' "production of linguistic forms becomes subordinate to higher-level decisions, related to the communication of meanings" (Littlewood, 1981, p. 89). The students are expected to select suitable language forms from his total repertoire and produce them fluently. The criterion for success is whether the meaning is conveyed effectively.

Through such training, the students will gradually develop their ability to think in English rather than translate in mind what they want to say.

While attempts to combine communication and formal instruction in language pedagogy are not new, the proposed SSC model is unique in bridging the first and third step with the second – situational practice of formal properties of sentences. Brumfit (1978) and Ellis (1982) propose that in such a combination, classroom activities should progress from communicative to formal instruction. Others suggest a progression in the opposite direction: from formal instruction to communication (Celce-Murcia and Hilles, 1988), from skills-getting to skills-using (Rivers and Temperley, 1978), or from mechanical drills to free communication (Paulston, 1971, Paulston and Bruder, 1976). Littlewood (1984) takes a more eclectic stance, suggesting that the sequence is changeable and it is up to the teacher to decide according to his/her students, specific content of the lesson and kinds of activities. I would suggest but not insist that in China, the classroom activities progress from formal instruction to communication.

I believe that Chinese students and teachers will be more comfortable with this arrangement. For now, however the teaching methodology develops and however the teachers and students look at English, they must make sure that structure and preparation for the exams are taken care of before any other attempts can be made. So it is very important for the class to begin with presentation of new materials and teachers' explanations followed by mechanical and situational practice. This way, the students and the teachers also have greater confidence to go about the ensuing communicative activities. When students are practicing the patterns, there is also an opportunity for the teacher to gain some practice in them too. Also, this sequence puts less stress upon teachers. Teachers can decide the amount of time to spend on communicative activities as they see fit according to how much time is left

when they finish the first two steps. Teachers have greater flexibility in the sense that they can decide how many communicative activities they would do according to their own competence. Those who are more confident in using CLT can spend more time on communicative activities than those who are less so. Besides, once the examination is taken into account, the teachers will be in a better position to get approval from the authorities on the changes in their classrooms.

However, it is not possible and not intended either to specify how much time of a lesson should be spent on each of the three steps. It depends on the contents of the lesson, the teacher and the students. As Taylor (1983) says, "our particular students' needs and the dynamics of our particular classes become major factors in deciding what to teach and how to teach it. " (p. 70). The methodology of teaching should vary significantly according to the environments in which teachers find themselves working (Sano, 1984).

Obviously, the challenge of such a model lies in the third step: the introduction of the communicative component. To provide a better ground for it to happen, there are several things that need to be considered. First, there should be a change in the fundamental approach to education in China if the communicative component is to be successfully incorporated into English teaching in China. With the present educational theory in operation, CLT will not be able to enter the Chinese English classrooms, since the predominance of teacher-centered, text-centered and grammar-centered practices in China does not provide a ground for the student-centered, fluency-focused and problem-solving activities required by CLT. As Price (1988) points out, reform of education is not simply reform of the school system, but reform of behavior and thinking of the wider social teaching-learning process that guides moral-political ideas and behavior. If the communicative component is to be integrated into a previously traditional classroom, both teachers and students

must "make a conceptual shift as to what English means and also how to learn it" (Penner, 1995, p. 5). An extensive reconceptulization of the overall instructional process is required by the teacher, the parents, administrators and others who support them. They must deliberately overturn an enduring stereotypical image of what a "good" Chinese public school classroom should be (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).

However, it is of paramount importance to be aware that it takes a long time for such a fundamental approach to change. "Changes in the way people think usually lag behind changes in social structure" (Yen, 1989, p. 49). It is easy to change the seating arrangement, but it is difficult to change the teachers' attitudes towards language learning (Valdes and Jhones, 1991). In fact, it is even difficult to change the seating arrangements in some cases when the desks are bolted to the floor and there are too many students in one room. Besides, the other support systems, such as teacher training and retraining opportunities and funding for extra expenses needed by CLT, will not be in place overnight.

In the process of negotiating the Communicative Approach in the traditional language teaching, special attention should be paid to helping students to adjust (Deckert, 1987). In introducing the Communicative Approach to students who have previously studied foreign language in traditional fashion, teachers are apt to encounter some initial student reservations. Students may manifest uneasiness, confusion, or even resistance in the requirements of new classroom activities. Thus, conscious assistance on the part of the teacher may be in order to deliberately reorient students in respect to "the basic function of the classroom, the role of the student and the nature of language" (Deckert, 1987, p. 20).

Inasmuch as the fact that teaching methodologies such as the Communicative Approach developed in Western situations are difficult to introduce into an EFL situation with a different educational theory, Sampson (1984) proposes that more work should be done to develop a framework to provide guidance in exporting teaching methods developed in one context into another. However, in the long run, efforts should also be made to develop methods in the Chinese educational context so that they can feed directly into the classroom practice. Rather than relying on importing Western language teaching methods, which many EFL countries have been doing so far, China should strive for the establishment of its own research contingent and promote method specialists and classroom teachers developing language teaching methods by working directly in its own EFL context so as to take into account the politics, economy, society, culture and the EFL situations in the country. In this way, they will be able to devise teaching methods "appropriate to their learners, their colleagues and their societies" (Edge, 1996, p. 18). Such method specialists could be: Chinese English teachers and language teaching researchers who have had the opportunity to be exposed to and become familiar with Western methods and theories of language learning and teaching either by attending Western universities or independent reading and research; Western language learning and teaching specialists who are willing and committed to working in China; teams consisting of Chinese teachers and specialists and Western language learning and teaching specialists.

There were similar Sino-foreign teacher education programs in China around mid-1980s. The most distinct problem that emerged in these joint programs was the discrepancy in the Chinese and foreign teachers' expectations for teacher education programs. Foreign teacher educators "anticipated conducting programs that incorporated methodology, linguistics, classroom observation, materials testing, and development." (Penner, 1995, p. 2). They assumed that Chinese teachers would be interested in learning about the

current Western ideas on the teaching of languages. However, the Chinese teachers preferred for language improvement in these programs. Such different expectations resulted in frustrations for both sides.

To make future collaborations more fruitful, there need to be changes on both sides. The Chinese teachers need to develop a true interest in methodology study and educational change. The present study seems to indicate that Chinese teachers today are interested in methodology study and educational change. While they saw the need to improve their English language ability, the respondents in the study expressed desire to learn more about English teaching methodology, for instance, Dingmei and Haigang. The teachers in secondary schools even started their own projects on CLT and were attempting to find ways to bring it into their teaching. In general there seems to be a better ground for more Sino-foreign joint efforts to improve English teaching in China.

For foreign teacher educators, they really need to emphasize the *collaborativeness* between them and their Chinese colleagues in such projects. Rather than going to China and telling their Chinese colleagues how they think English should be taught as a second/foreign language, they might find it more helpful to first find out with their Chinese colleagues what their problems are and what their expertise can contribute to understanding these problems, and then together work out possible solutions. These teachers' interest in language and student learning is one base for such collaboration. Also, when tentative solutions are designed, the foreign experts should demonstrate to their Chinese colleagues that they are possible in the Chinese context and their Chinese colleagues can teach the way as designed. For a better effect, they may consider having one or several of their Chinese colleagues to do the demonstration. One advantage is that the demonstration will be more convincing to other Chinese teachers that they can do it too. Also the Chinese teachers can get some hands-on experience during the program

by doing such demonstration lessons and that will greatly increase their confidence when they go back to their teaching. Besides, this will also help the foreign teacher educators see problems that they might have overlooked in designing these solutions for Chinese teachers and be able to rectify them in time. In doing the demonstration lessons, foreign teacher educators should always consider all the possible limitations in Chinese English teaching, such as teachers' English proficiency, the need to teach to the examinations, large class size, and limited resources.

Implications for Teacher Education in China

In the process of negotiating the Communicative Approach in traditional language teaching, special attention should be paid to helping teachers to adjust (Abbot, 1987) and to upgrade. Thus, opportunities should be made available for inservice teachers to retrain and refresh themselves in CLT. In carrying out in-service training for teachers, there are several things that need particular attention.

First, careful planning is needed for in-service teacher education. As discussed earlier, China is experiencing a shortage of teachers in almost all subjects, with English in particular. All teachers have already been overloaded. It is very difficult to remove many teachers from the frontline to study in teacher retraining programs and it is not possible for them to study there for long under whatever circumstances. Therefore, careful and early planning seems all the more important. One way might be, rather than running such programs during the regular school terms, such programs can be offered during the summer vacation or the winter vacation, when teachers are not teaching and have more free time. It is not possible to keep teachers in such programs for long, so short intensive programs might be preferred. Also, it is impossible to retrain all teachers. It might be desirable to select some teachers from each school for

such programs. Once they finish the program, they will be able to pass on to their colleagues what they have learned.

Obviously, teaching methods, especially CLT, can be one of the major content areas for such programs. Teachers should be guided to think about English teaching in China, its achievements and problems and how they think they can be solved. They should be encouraged to explore CLT as to how it works and how it can help English teaching in their own classrooms. Most importantly, CLT should not be lectured to the teachers. Rather, it must be demonstrated to them as to why and how it works. Opportunities should also be provided so that the teachers can get some hands-on experience and confidence in using CLT in these programs. Also, development of teachers' abilities to devise language teaching materials according to different needs of the students should be included in such programs. Since it is not possible to produce a good series of textbooks for all teachers, students and schools, it is very important for teacher education programs to equip teachers with the skills in material development.

Littlewood (1984) cautions us that improper inservice teacher education can cause confusion about CLT and thus do disservice, for instance, a presentation of CLT as a collection of new "classroom tricks", especially tricks for setting up communication activities, without explaining how they fit into a coherent framework--how they relate to each other and other aspects of teaching. These tricks would be of limited use to a teacher if he or she has not clarified the rationale behind them and worked out, for himself or herself, how they fit into a coherent approach. Only then "can he locate them in his repertoire and deploy them appropriately with the goal in view" (p. 3).

Besides, a language improvement component should be incorporated in all teacher training programs (Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994). While all the language skills should be taken care of, emphasis should be placed upon the

trainees' speaking and listening skills because that is what Chinese English teachers are weak at in general and what CLT and other more recent teaching methods hold as their most basic demand for teachers (Lai, 1993).

Second, efforts are also needed to help teachers adjust. Some teachers may be reluctant to try the Communicative Approach as it forgoes much of the familiar and requires something different. "People are so traditionally minded; They feel the safest way is just to carry on the way they always have. So one has to urge them to try out new ideas and materials". (Da Freire, 1985) Assistance should be made available to the teachers to encourage and help them to take the first step. Helping reluctant teachers start is only the first step. It is also very important to maintain the support for those who may need further help along the way with CLT. For that purpose, efforts must be made to make better use of the teaching consultants hired by the educational board. Rather than sitting most of the time in their offices, teaching consultants should be encouraged to go to schools, talk with teachers, understand their concerns and difficulties, and provide help when needed. It is important that they make themselves available to the teachers. Educational boards or teaching consultants can also consider organizing regular workshops and seminars for English teachers so that they can share with others their problems in teaching and may work in collaboration towards solutions to their problems.

The above-mentioned also applies to pre-service teacher education programs. In addition, attention should also be paid to revising the curricula for pre-service teacher education programs. The curricula in various normal institutions may be different. However, there is one thing in common--overemphasis on subject matter knowledge with little stress on professional education. As Cleverley (1991) observed, "much of the curriculum in teacher education is devoted to academic work related to an individual's teaching subjects." (p. 250). In an average English teacher education program, approximately 60 percent of total

class hours are dedicated to courses in English, approximately 30 percent in required core courses, and 10 percent on professional educational courses plus a 6- to 8- week practicum. The professional education courses are usually psychology, educational philosophy, and English teaching methodology. By the time they graduate, most prospective teachers generally know their subject very well "as an expert but not as a teacher" (Shulman 1987). Predictably, they will encounter lots of difficulties in their classrooms once they start teaching. "One cannot be a good teacher of a subject unless one is a good student of that subject; teaching cannot be content-free. But to be a good teacher, it is not enough to know a subject well as a student. One must know its pedagogy. One must know it as a teacher, not just as a student" (Holmes Group, 1986, p. 12). To adequately prepare pre-service teachers, changes must be made in the curriculum of normal institutions to incorporate more professional educational courses into English teacher education programs.

What is more important, considering the dynamic nature of the EFL teaching and the ever-appearing language learning and teaching theories, pre-service teacher training should focus on the development of the student teachers' autonomy and their decision-making and problem-solving abilities, as well as being a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983; Bartlett, 1990; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). As Richards and Lockhart point out, classroom teachers' reflection on their own teaching is a great source of information to assist teachers to better understand their underlying pedagogical perspectives and improve their instructional practice. This will build them as independent teachers who will be able to solve problems later in their teaching rather than simply implement what they remember from university. They will themselves be able to come to conclusions about what to keep or change (Wallace, 1991; Richards and Nunan, 1990).

Also, student teachers should be encouraged to think critically about teaching. Many of the Chinese teachers regard themselves as mere implementers of curricula. Their duties are to do what they are told. They are not in the position to make decisions and even influence decisions about English teaching in China. As a result, changes in teaching methodology in TEFL in China has been very slow. As Frymier (1987) states, "in any attempt to improve education, teachers are central." (p. 9). Therefore, to empower teachers so that they have a stronger sense of participation in decisions that directly affect their work is very important in both pre- and in-service teacher education programs.

Expatriate Teachers in China

This study also holds implications for both present and prospective expatriate teachers in China. First, it is very important for present and prospective teachers to have an open mind when they teach in China. China is a huge country and it has its traditions and cultures and its particular philosophy of education. China has its own "special features", to use a popular Chinese phrase. Because of this, English teaching in China has its own complexities and may defy understanding within a short period, especially when the expatriate teachers do not communicate in the local language. With this understanding, it is very important for expatriate teachers to have an open mind towards Chinese English teaching and their Chinese colleagues and understand the conditions for English teaching in China. As suggested by Dirksen (1990), both initial understanding of the Chinese educational system and individual Chinese learners and continued investigation of Chinese learning styles and further dialogues with Chinese methodologists will be invaluable.

To understand China will help them with their teaching in China and make it enjoyable. In order to learn more about China and its people and culture, it is

very important for the expatriate teachers to learn to communicate in the local language. This may have been difficult sometimes. Some expatriate teachers intended to learn Chinese but were frustrated that their Chinese colleagues would talk to them only in English. However, it is still possible for expatriates to learn to speak Chinese, especially if they are willing to find different people for practice. For instance, rather than rely on talking to their colleagues, they can practice with any Chinese students, teachers and workers through exchanging language lessons. This should not be difficult at all in China now that there are so many people eager to learn English in China today. Also, they can go shopping at the local "Free Market", normally within walking distance. They can get lots of practice in Chinese there too.

Besides, expatriate teachers should have a good knowledge of English grammar. As discussed previously, Chinese students are interested in English grammar, will ask many questions about English grammar and expect the expatriate teachers to be experts on it. Therefore, explicit knowledge of the English grammar is needed if they do not want to feel embarrassed in front of the students.

What is most important though is that the teachers should have a proper attitude towards implementation of CLT in China. The expatriate teachers should be aware of the fact that their Chinese colleagues are teaching in a different context. They are working under different political structure, different educational system and different educational philosophy deeply embedded in the traditional Chinese culture. For reasons of all sorts, they have many difficulties in using CLT which might be unfamiliar to ESL teachers. "And as visitors, EFL instructors can hardly expect simply to impose their pet methods or theories" (Sivell, 1986, p. 19). "They must be very sensitive to the traditional Chinese methods and the needs of teachers and students, understand the limitations and constraints of the Chinese teachers'" (Anderson, 1993, p. 479).

The attitude of "we've got it right" and a too strong push for CLT in China can only meet with resistance and even resentment.

However, it must be pointed out that the expatriate teachers should not be discouraged to pass on to their Chinese colleagues the new ideas about language teaching. Otherwise, their roles as expatriate teachers are not fulfilled. According to Porter (1990), China wants to hire expatiate teachers for several reasons, for example, to learn advanced Western knowledge, to establish contacts with foreign institutions through expatriate teachers, and to strengthen the teaching of English listening and speaking skills and English culture. Another most important reason is that "foreign experts" will bring new theories about language learning and teaching to China though their teaching and interaction with the local Chinese teachers. Nevertheless, they are cautioned to remember theoretically desirable changes in approach will not always "sell themselves" (Sivell, 1983), so cautious patience might seem obvious. In terms of introducing CLT, the attitude of helping Chinese teachers' incorporate a communicative component into traditional Chinese teaching will be a desirable one.

Implications for Research in and outside China

The teachers really emphasized their disadvantages of teaching English as a foreign language and the frustration of the research community in China and the rest of the world not paying due attention to EFL. They felt that their questions, concerns and English teaching issues are not sufficiently addressed in the existing research. Therefore, to help Chinese English teaching and probably EFL teaching in general, more effort should be made to research on the special features of English learning and teaching in EFL situations. Also, more time and efforts might be devoted to studies on the characteristics and learning styles of Chinese English learners and English

teaching in China. Better knowledge in these aspects will help to develop English teaching methods which will better address the unique issues in EFL classrooms and thus will more readily fit into the EFL teaching.

Also, some studies of the differences between ESL and EFL are in order (Richards, 1986; Penner, 1995). This has so far been a neglected area in second language education. When more knowledge in this aspect of language learning difference is available, we will know better how to go about the use of teaching methods such as CLT in EFL countries. This will be helpful to devising a framework for exportation of teaching methods from one situation to another as suggested by Sampson (1984).

There is a third thing that the research community can do to provide immediate assistance to the incorporation of CLT into English teaching in China and other EFL countries. Since one of the major challenges that EFL teachers encounter in using CLT is their low proficiency in sociolinguistic and strategic competence, and the teacher trainees cannot go to study in English-speaking countries for such knowledge for long periods of time, English language scholars should continue to study and describe the essence of sociolinguistic competence in English and rules for strategies to prevent communication breakdowns. Such information can help to provide better preparation programs for EFL teachers. Besides, "this information can also be used to develop cognitively based resources and activities to support communicative English language learning" (Burnaby and Sun, 1989). These are actually primary areas of ongoing research in the West, but I consider it worth reiterating, especially for English teaching in China.

In the study, grammar instruction is one of the focuses. It keeps popping up in the conversations and discussions. The teachers feel and think that grammar instruction is necessary for Chinese students, but in many cases in China,

grammar became a substitute for *using* the language. So a study as to how to balance grammar instruction and communicative competence is called for to provide more direct assistance to classroom English teachers. Also of interest to Chinese teachers is the issue of how to best teach grammar to Chinese students. Does it have to be teacher-centered lectures on grammar? Are there alternatives for grammar instruction, such as the grammar consciousness-raising tasks that Ellis and Fotos have been doing in Japan?

Fotos and Ellis (1991) recommended a task-based approach to grammar instruction using a task type which provides learners with grammar problems to solve interactively. They call such tasks grammar consciousness-raising tasks. Each of such tasks has a L2 grammar problem as the content. "Although the learners focus on the form of the grammar structure, they are also engaged in meaning-focused use of the target language as they solve the problem" (Fotos, 1994, p. 325). They develop grammatical knowledge while they are communicating. However, according to Fotos (1994), the grammar consciousness-raising task is not aimed at developing immediate ability to use the target structure but rather attempts to call learners' attention to grammatical features, raising their consciousness of them, and thereby facilitating subsequent learner noticing of the features in communicative input.

Fotos believes that there are two distinct pedagogical advantages in having grammar as the task content.

> First, grammar problems constitute serious task material, in contrast to the trivial nature of many communicative tasks. This point is particularly important in EFL teaching situations where formal, teacher-fronted grammar instruction characterizes many classrooms and communicative activities may not be regarded as serious language study. Second, when learners share the same L1, it is often possible for them to complete task requirements in that L1, avoiding use of the target language. Having a grammar problem as the task content requires

> learners to use and attend to utterances in the target language in order to solve the task. (p. 326)

These pedagogical advantages seem to be appealing to English teaching in China. China may be able to use some of the ideas in the grammar consciousness-raising tasks as alternatives of grammar-instruction. At least this is an area that is worthy of China's attention.

Another focus of the study is the role of examinations in shaping TEFL in China. The problems with examinations in China are overuse of examinations and English examinations being grammar-based. As a consequence, Chinese English teaching has been concentrating on grammar instruction and overlooking the development of students' communicative competence. Therefore, studies are needed to seek possible alternatives for written examinations as a selection mechanism. Studies will also be helpful in how to modify the present grammar-based English examinations so that they will better test English learners English communicative competence rather than grammatical knowledge of English only in the hope that they will exert a more positive influence upon Chinese TEFL. Also, considering the large population of English learners in China, it is and will be very difficult to rely on oral English tests to test their communicative competence. Better ways have to be found for this purpose. How to test English learners' communicative competence effectively and efficiently has been an issue in research but it is worth reiterating.

Large class instruction is an important characteristic of Chinese TEFL and many other third world EFL countries. Teachers found it difficult to teach with so many students in a class. How to teach English in large class or how to reduce class size calls for research so as to provide more assistance to Chinese teachers and learners.

Another area that needs study and will be of benefit to Chinese teachers is how to encourage students sharing the same first language to communicate in English in class. Students sharing the same first language do not feel the need to communicate in English in class. Very often students discuss or talk in their own language rather than in English and hence lose many valuable language use opportunities. If they can be encouraged to communicate in English, the opportunities for them to practise and use English will increase considerably.

Equally of assistance to Chinese teachers is a study or studies as to how to provide more opportunities for English learners in EFL situations to practise or use English outside English class. There are some extra-curricular English activities in Chinese urban educational institutions already. The popular ones include: English corners on university campuses and in public city parks, English clubs in universities and secondary schools, English weeks in secondary schools, and news report in English on TV. Some of them are organized by schools or universities and others are spontaneous. Some students have benefited from these activities. However, often these activities are not very well-organized and not yet best exploited. Further research on more, better activities to help Chinese learners to learn English outside class and how to make better use of the ones that already exist is worth pursuing in the hope that the EFL learning environment will be improved.

The role of technology in ESL/EFL has been recognized by more and more people in the field. Some professional journals have published special issues on computer application, especially the use of the internet in ESL/EFL teaching and learning. In its attempt to bring changes into English teaching in the country, China needs to look at this area of technology for possibilities. For instance, it may help to provide more opportunities for English learners to interact with English, offer them better English learning environments, reduce

teachers' workload, increase language input to students, better meet individual students' special needs, and so on.

However, because of its limited funding, China has not really tapped into the area of technology application in English teaching or education in general. China might want to encourage those rich areas in the southeastern provinces to take a lead in this endeavor. Their experience in such experiments will provide directions for those provinces who will eventually be able to afford the technology with their economic development. Their successes with technology will also create pressure for other provinces to introduce technology in English teaching as soon as they are financially able to do so.

In fact, China has already found interest in technology in English teaching. For instance, the State Education Commission has recently set a new requirement for teachers. Both in-service and preservice teachers are required to reach a certain level of computer literacy in order to keep their positions or assume new teaching positions. The rationale behind this requirement is that teachers' knowledge of computers will enable them to make use it to help them teach better. But how to provide all the teachers training in computer technology and how to best make use of the technology in China is not clear yet. Therefore, technology application in English teaching in China should be an interesting and promising area of future research.

The End without an End

This study set out to investigate the English teaching in China, particularly to understand why CLT embraced by ESL teachers has had a difficult time in getting into Chinese EFL classrooms. It suggests that Chinese English teachers have found that CLT is useful for China, but, because of the present unfavorable conditions in China, they have met with many serious difficulties in

trying to use the method. Nevertheless, Chinese teachers have felt strong desire and need for changes in Chinese English teaching and they have been working toward possible changes within their reach on an individual basis.

Since CLT was introduced into China, Chinese teachers and researchers have been trying to find ways to use it to improve their English teaching. Today, this effort is still going on. This is very comforting for me as a learner, teacher, researcher and father who is going back to work in the Asian context.

As a teacher, I had taught English in the Chinese context for seven years before I came over to study in Canada. I had experienced the joys and frustrations in teaching English in China. Like these teachers in this study, I had also done a good deal of thinking about English teaching in China: how to improve it? how to use CLT in my classroom? Where should Chinese English teaching be going? It was exactly these questions that led me to the idea of doing the present study.

Upon finishing this study, I will be teaching in China again. I am excited at the thought that I will be able to try many new things in my teaching and use many of the educational ideas I have learned in the last three years. However, I also foresee many difficulties that I have to conquer, and another series of joys and frustrations that are waiting for me to experience. I am expecting to have rich data to write another series of learning and teaching stories in a few years. Besides being a teacher and learner, I have another role to perform, a father, which is really new and unfamiliar to me. My son, Stanley, is about one year old. Soon he will grow and start to go to kindergarten and school. What will he go through there? How will he learn English? How will he get his education? Shall I expect him to go through what I went through in China? Sometimes, I think it will be good for him to let him experience similar difficulties that I had when I was young, believing that such hardship will steel him to be a stronger man to

meet with challenges later in his life. However, another strong if not stronger voice in me tells me not to let such a thing happen again, because I myself today do not even want to think of the pressure and stress I had as a student in China. I remember when I was conversing with one of the participants I described my schooling and education in China as a series of battles, one after another. I felt so tired that I do not believe I could survive such an experience again. For my son, I will have to continue to work and research for better understanding of learning and teaching in the hope that a better society and more pleasant environment will be for him.

As a researcher, a language education researcher, my career has just turned over a new leaf. There are lots of possibilities and opportunities ahead of me. In order to grow, I will also need to continue to work and study language teaching and learning. At this point, the present study is drawing to a conclusion. However, to me, this study is but a beginning of a new series of study, experience and understanding. It is, to use a popular Chinese idiom, "the first step of the Great Long March (*wan li chang zheng de di yi bu*)".

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Appendix A: Permission Documents

December 26, 1996

Dear Teachers,

I am presently a doctoral student in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. I am interested in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China and have chosen to study it for my dissertation.

The purpose of this study is to explore your experience with teaching English in China, especially your experience with Communicative Language Teaching in the Chinese context. I would like to find out your ideas as to the following questions:

What problems are there inherent in English teaching in China
What can CLT contribute to English teaching in China?
How feasible is CLT in China?
What are the difficulties you have had in your attempts to use CLT?
Can these difficulties be overcome? If yes, how and to what extent?

I would appreciate it if you could participate in this study. I am going to hold four major interviews with you. The interviews will take one to two hours each and will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you. I would also like to observe you teaching on a regular basis (approximately once a week for eight weeks) to help me better understand the complexities and dynamics of your classroom. Both the transcripts of the interviews and the notes of the classroom observations will be analyzed to develop a profile. I would then meet you again to see if you feel the profile accurately portrays you and your ideas, and for you to change or delete any information you wish. You, the research auditor(s), and I will be the only ones who will have access to this information. All names and places will be changed in the final report of the study. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, I shall be glad to answer them.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

DEFENG LI

Please complete this form and return it to me.

I, _____ (print your name), give Mr. DEFENG LI permission to use the results of the interviews and classroom observations in his research.

I understand that I am guaranteed anonymity in the above circumstances and that names of schools, teachers and students will be changed in the final report.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Appendix B: A Sample of the Data and Its English Translation
(*excerpt from the first interview with Haigang*)

德凤：首先请你作个简单的自我介绍，好吗？

海刚：我是1983年9月进入H师范大学外文系学习。1987年7月获得英语语言文学专业学士学位，同年参加了高校硕士研究生入学考试，后来进了N师范大学外文系英语语言文学专业研究生班学习。两年后就被分配到Q学院英语教研室工作。从89年研究生班毕业至今我已经教了大约八年书了。1990年，我开始写硕士毕业论文，1991年初完稿，获得英汉翻译学硕士学位。这些年来，我一直从事英语教学和科研。我教过许多学生，上过多种课。我教的学生大多是英语专业学生，所教过的课程包括英语阅读、英语会话、英语听说、英语语法。1993年初，我被任命为英语教研室主任，1995年10月被任命为基础科学系副主任兼外语教研室主任。作为系副主任，我的工作主要是负责全系的教学工作。基科系是全校的一个大系，有98位教师和一般工作人员。做了几年的系主任，我对这个系的运行算是有了不少了解。

德凤：除了教学和行政，谈谈你的科研情况好吗？

海刚：我非常喜欢科研，一直很热衷于搞科研。近年来，我的科研主要集中在三个方面：首先是英汉翻译理论与实践的研究。目前理论研究做得还较少，翻译实践比较多，翻译出版了不少气象类教材、资料和画册等。第二方面主要是英语阅读课教学。第三方面是英语写作课的教学。在这两方面我最近都出版了书并发表了论文。

德凤：业余爱好呢？

海刚：业余爱好多了，武术，围棋，养鸽，唱歌，跳舞。

德凤：可不可以请你谈谈你的生活经历？可以从童年开始。

海刚：我老家在贵兴矿务局。我中学小学都是在那里上的。我父亲是矿工，曾经受过伤。我母亲没有工作。所以当我还很小的时候，我就帮助我母亲锤石头挣钱养家。我家当时很穷，我上有三个姐姐，下有两个妹妹，全家就我父亲一个人工作。另外，我还经常帮家里拣煤或上山砍柴。总的来说，我的整个童年就是上学和干活。然而，当我很小的时候，我就对英语非常感兴趣。我是初一时开始学英语的，我的英语考试成绩一直很好，到初三时，我就已经开始自学当时的大学一年级的英语教材了。

德凤：你为什么会对英语这样有兴趣呢？

海刚：我为什么对英语这样有兴趣？我想这大概是缘分吧。另外，与我的第一位英语老师也很有关。记得我做第一次英语作业，我做得非常好，英语老师把我好好表扬了一番。我当时心里非常高兴，此后一直想学好英语，希望能得到老师的表扬。

德凤：你为什么想进大学呢？

海刚：这主要与家庭有关。我父母没有要求我上大学。但是，当时虽然偶尔有人离开矿务局去别的地方工作，我们家没有一个人离开过矿区。我就很想能走出矿区去看看外面的世界。另外，我们家当时的经济状况很糟，因此，想改变我们家的经济状况可谓是另一个重要的动力。因为我知道，如果我能上大学，毕业后就能得到一份拿薪水的工作，比当矿工要强得多。

但高考后，我感觉只能进个大专，所以我想最好还是留在家，早点为家里挣点钱，因为我家当时真的很需要我做工。我妈也叫我不要上了。她说：“你已经读了这么

多年书了，还读什么书呢？”但结果，我考出来的成绩还不错。另外由于我是市“三好学生”，追加20分，这样我的总分就达到了H师范大学的录取分数线，并被该校录取了。

新洁经历正好与我相反。她高考分数很高，报考了部属X大学，结果不知为什么被H师范大学录取了。

德凤： 你是什么时候知道自己要做老师的？

海刚： 我一进H师大就知道我以后要做中学老师。对此我倒并没有不开心，实际上我很愿意当老师。我中学时候的朋友都知道我喜欢当老师，说我“好为人师”。说实话，我当时并不在意毕业后当中学英语老师，因为能够逃避当矿工的苦役我已经很开心了。但是后来在大学时与新洁谈恋爱了。我们来自H省不同地区，我们老家相隔好远。根据当时的政策，我们肯定要各自回老家中学去当老师。那样问题就大了，这意味着我们毕业后就不能在一起了。即使结婚后，我们也无法调到一起工作，那就可成了“牛郎织女”了。为了两人能在一起，我和新洁决定参加研究生入学考试，争取读研究生，因为研究生分配灵活性较大。我们俩同时报考了N师范大学的应用语言学研究生班。在激烈的竞争后，我们都被录取了。

德凤： 你们为什么当时选择N师范大学，它离你们老家这么远？你们为什么没有报考你们所在的大学？

海刚： 这有几个原因，一是想换个环境。在H师范大学呆的时间太长了，就想去沿海的城市看看。另一个重要原因与我们谈恋爱有关。你知道，当时不主张大学生谈恋爱。我当时是团支书，新洁是女生部长。我们谈恋爱的事后来被系里发现了，系总支书记找我们谈话，要我们停止恋爱。当然我们没有听。由于这件事，我们跟系里的关系搞得很不愉快。我们对系里很有看法，所以决定离开这个系。

德凤： 你从N师大毕业后就被分配到这里吗？你至今工作几年了？

海刚： 我毕业后就来这里工作，现在已经干八年了。

德凤： 能不能谈谈你做老师的”酸甜苦辣”？

海刚： 总的来说，我确实很喜欢做教师，我真的认为中国需要我们这样的人。另外，通过教书，我可以把自己的思想观点教给学生。但是，当老师确实太清苦了，工资还不如工人高。我常常得去外边兼点课，贴补家里的开支。这么多年来，我的好多朋友都劝我离开大学去找一份收入丰厚的职业，因为现在外面需要外语人才地方很多。事实上，我有两次很好的机会，一次是到金陵饭店当高级翻译兼一个部门经理，工资待遇是我当时的十倍。另一次是德国的一位经理看中我，让我当他的公司在中国的代理，工资高得让你难以相信。可是我最终还是决定不去。说实话，我现在很后悔。我想我可能要当一辈子老师了。但我很想能去英语国家深造一下。作为英语老师，我要不去国外深造一下，始终只能是“闭门造车”。我去国外想主要学习研究一下交际教学法。我认为交际法会对我国英语教学有帮助。

Defeng: Could you please start with a brief self-introduction?

Haigang: I went to H Normal University in September 1983 and got my B.A. in English language and literature in July 1987. In the same year, I sat the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Studies and was then admitted to the postgraduate program in English language and literature in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature in N Normal University. I studied there for 2 years and was then assigned to teach in Q Institute. Since I finished my postgraduate study in 1989, I have been a teacher for about 8 years. In 1990, I started to work on my M.A. thesis and finished it in early 1991 and was then conferred the M.A. in Translation Studies. Throughout these years, I have been actively involved in English teaching and research. I have taught many students and taught a variety of courses. The students I have taught were mostly university students majoring in English. The courses I have taught include English Reading, English Conversation, English Listening And Speaking, and English Grammar. In early 1993, I was appointed the director of the English section and in October 1995 I was appointed the associate chair of the Department of Fundamental Studies while holding the position of Director of the English Section. My duties as the associate chair is to take charge of the teaching in the department. It is a big department in this university. There are about 98 staff in the department. After a few years of being the associate chair, I have got a fairly good knowledge of the operation of the department.

Defeng: Apart form teaching and administration, tell me something about your research, OK?

Haigang: I like doing research very much and have always been actively involved in it. Over the past few years, my research has been in these three areas. The first area is English vs. Chinese translation theory and practice. I haven't done much in theory, but did quite a bit of work in translation practice. I have translated and published some teaching materials and documents in meteorology and some collections of Chinese paintings. The second area is teaching methodology of EFL Reading. The third area is teaching methodology of EFL writing. In both of these two areas I have recently published articles and books.

Defeng: How about your hobbies?

Haigang: I have many hobbies, such as Wushu (Chinese Martial Arts), Weiqi (playing goes), racing pigeons, singing and dancing.

Defeng: Could you tell me some of your life stories? You may want to begin with your childhood?

Haigang: My hometown was in Zixin Coal Mine. My father was a coal miner who was once injured at work. My mother was unemployed. When I was very young, I helped my mother break stones into smaller pieces to make money for my family. My family was very poor then. I had three elder sisters and two younger sisters. Besides breaking stones, I often went to collect coal and firewood on the hills. To summarize, I attended schools and worked a lot in my childhood. However, when I was very young, I took great interest in English. I started to learn English in junior one. I always got good scores in English

exams. When I was in junior three, I started to read English textbooks for university students.

Defeng: How did you get to be so interested in English?

Haigang: Why was I interested in English? I believe in fate. Besides, I think it was also related to my first English teacher. I remember when I did the first English exercise, I did very well and my English teacher praised me a lot for that. I was very happy and since then had wanted to do well in it to get more praise from my teacher.

Defeng: Why did you want to study at a university?

Haigang: It was again related to my family. My parents did not push me much to study at a university. But because no one in my family had ever left the mine, though there had been people leaving the mine from time to time, I wanted to leave the mine to see the larger world outside. Also, my family was really poor then, so to change the economic status of my family was another very important driving force for me. I knew, if I went to university, I would be able to get a job with a salary after graduation. This would be much better than working in the mine.

However, after the exams, I felt I could only enter a three-year college. So I thought I'd better stay home and start to make some money for my family because my family really needed my help at that time. My mother also told me not to study at the college. She said to me, "You have been in school for many years, why do you want to study more in school?". But then it turned out that I got a pretty good score in the exams. Also, because I was awarded the Prize for District "Three-Merit Student", I got 20 points on top of my actual exam score when considered for admission. So my admission score reached the requirement of H Normal University and was then admitted into the university.

Xingji had a totally different experience. She got very high score in the exams and she applied for the then Education Ministry administered X University. But for reasons she didn't know, she was admitted to H Normal University.

Defeng: When did you realize that you would be a middle school English teacher?

Haigang: As soon as I entered the university, I knew that I was to become a middle school English teacher. I did not mind that. I actually like to be a teacher. My friends all knew that I liked to be a teacher and told me that I "enjoyed being a teacher of others". Honestly, I did not at all mind being a middle school English teacher after graduation because I was more than happy to be able to escape the labor in the mine. But, when I was studying at the university, I fell in love with Xingji. We were from different parts of the province and our hometowns were far from each other. According to the policy then we would be assigned to teach in middle schools in our hometowns. That would be very difficult for us. That meant that we would not be able to stay together after graduation. Even if we got married, it would be very difficult for either of us to transfer to teach in the other's working area. We would then be "Liu Lang and Zhi Lu" (the Ox Man and the Weaving Fair), eternally separated. To be together, Xingji and I decided to sit the Entrance Examinations for Graduate Study and try to get into a postgraduate program. Normally, it was much more flexible when it came to job assignment for graduate students. We then both applied for the

postgraduate program in Applied Linguistics in N Normal University and were both admitted after a fierce competition.

Defeng: Why did you choose N Normal University? It was so far from your hometown. Why not applied to the university where you were studying then?

Haigang: Well, there are a few reasons. First, we both desired to study in a new environment. After four lengthy years in H Normal University, we really wanted to see the life in some of the coastal cities. Another important reason was related to the fact that Xingji and I were in love then. As you know, at that time, university students were not allowed to be in love. I was the League secretary of my class and Xingji was the Monitor for girl students. We were then reported to the department. The Party Secretary asked to see us and demanded that we put an end to our relation. Of course we did not listen to him. Because of this, the department was very unhappy with us and we had our reservations about our department. So we decided to leave it.

Defeng: You have always been teaching in this institute since you graduated from N Normal University? How many years have you been working?

Haigang: I started to teach here right after my graduation. I have been working here for eight years now.

Defeng: Tell me some of your joys and frustrations of being a teacher?

Haigang: In general I enjoyed my work. I really believe that Chinese education needs people like us. Also I think through teaching I can disseminate my ideas and opinions to my students. But, it is really unrewarding in terms of salary and other benefits. I have been a teacher for 8 years. I found I have made very little money. Our life condition is thus far from being satisfactory. I have to teach some evening classes outside the university to make some money to help with the family expenses

Throughout the years of being an English teacher, my kind-hearted friends have suggested to me that I should leave the university to seek a much better paid job since there are so many companies that hire English-speaking personnel. In fact, I have had at least two very good opportunities to quit teaching. One was to be an advanced interpreter and a department manager in a Five-Star Hotel. The proposed salary was ten times mine at the institute. Another time, a German Manager took interest in me and wanted to hire me as the representative for his company in China. The pay was so high that I could hardly believe it. But I decided not to go. Honestly, I regret now.

I think I'll probably be a teacher all my life. I would like to go to study in an English-speaking country. As a teacher of English, if I do not go out to further my study in an English-speaking country, I will be, to use a Chinese idiom, 'making carts behind closed doors'. When I go to an English country, I would like to work on English teaching methodology. I would like to learn more about the Communicative Approach. I believe it has potential for our English teaching.